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THE AIR FORCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

AIR POWER HELPS STOP THE INVASION AND END THE WAR

1972

by

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FOREWORD

This monograph is the sixteenth in a series of historical studies dealing with USAF plans, policies, and operations in Southeast Asia, published under the general title, The Air Force in Southeast Asia. Its focus is on Air Force participation in the last tempestuous year of US involvement in the war in Vietnam when, after the great majority of US forces had been withdrawn, Hanoi launched its smashing Easter offensive. This study relates how air, as almost the sole remaining US weapon, played a complex and varied role. This consisted not only of its key part in the military operations which turned back the enemy offensive, but also of its influence on the negotiating process and its exercise of a "persuasion" role for US diplomacy.

In writing this monograph, the author found a lack of sources not encountered in previous monographs in this series. The important peace negotiations of 1972 and the decisions and communications pertaining to Linebacker II operations were all kept highly secret. Almost no official accounts of them are available, either in JCS, Defense, Air Force, or State Department records. These matters were dealt with only at the highest levels, and many researchers believe this was done orally with decisions not committed to paper. Since the Nixon and Kissinger papers will not be available for many years, this study has utilized certain detailed and seemingly reliable secondary sources to fill in some of the information gaps, until such time as the full story is available from official records.

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1

I INTRODUCTION

(U) The year 1972 in the Vietnam war was a period of almost kaleidoscopic developments for the Air Force, changing from peace to war and back again, and then again. During the first months, President Richard M. Nixon's administration kept on withdrawing US forces as planned while intensifying efforts to strengthen South Vietnamese forces and negotiate an end to the war. To help insure success in these objectives, it continued to depend on air, both as its withdrawal shield and as its remaining effective weapon. Air interdiction strikes were intensified to prevent enemy troops and supplies from coming south to confront South Vietnamese forces. The campaign to counter aggressive enemy air defense operations continued as forcefully as possible within the restrictions of the US Rules of Engagement. USAF-monitored activation and training of the South Vietnamese Air Force were on schedule. Despite its own still active role, the US Air Force tended to share the Administration's hope of US withdrawal by the end of the year, leaving a South Vietnam capable of fighting its own battles.

(U) All schedules and plans were thrown into complete disorder however with the North Vietnamese "Easter invasion" beginning 30 March. This enemy move not only disrupted all withdrawal operations, it required a tremendous augmentation of forces, particularly of US air forces, to bring it to a halt. The 8-division invasion force, including large numbers of tanks, entered South Vietnam from three different directions and developed three major battle fronts in Military Regions I, II, and III.

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(U) By July, largely due to US air efforts supporting the South Vietnamese defenders, the enemy advance was checked and plans could resume for continuing withdrawals. The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and the field commanders were cautious on proceeding too rapidly with further reductions, but the President, anxious to keep to his earlier plans, pressed on and in September authorized a US force of "not more than 27,000" in South Vietnam by 1 December 1972.

(U) Concurrently, the Administration pushed its two other objectives: strengthening of the South Vietnamese forces, especially the VNAF, and stepped-up cease-fire negotiations. The President ordered a massive equipment delivery program for South Vietnam, beginning in May, called Project Enhance, which included over 500 additional planes for the South Vietnamese Air Force. The Administration's renewed negotiation efforts in late summer bore fruit when in October the North Vietnamese submitted a draft peace proposal. The Administration received this favorably, but a snag developed when the secret terms of the agreement became known. Strong objections from South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu, US military leaders, and conservative elements in the US made the President decide to revise the terms of the agreement to improve the allied position before signing it. He postponed the 31 October signing deadline and directed another greatly increased equipment delivery to South Vietnam, including 619 more aircraft for the South Vietnamese Air Force.

(U) When negotiations resumed in Paris on 20 November the North Vietnamese strongly protested the stiffer US demands and the new

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measures to strengthen South Vietnam's position. Threatened with renewed bombing of the North unless they negotiated "seriously," the North Vietnamese said they would continue the war rather than give in to the new US demands. With matters completely deadlocked, the chief negotiators of both sides left Paris on 14 December. The United States later charged that the North Vietnamese had been deliberately stalling, a tactic which the Administration, pressured by Congress and domestic opinion to end the war, could not tolerate.

(U) On 18 December, after a 72-hour Presidential ultimatum to Hanoi on negotiating "seriously" had expired, the Administration announced resumption of full scale bombing of North Vietnam and mining of its harbors, and warned this would continue "until such time as a settlement is arrived at." The bombing attacks continued until 30 December, with some 600 planes dropping over 15,000 tons of explosives on military targets in North Vietnam. More than a thousand sorties were flown, 729 by B-52s.

(U) On 30 December, the White House announced that talks would be resumed and bombing above the 20th parallel halted. On 2 January, low-level negotiations with Hanoi resumed, followed by meetings between the top negotiators a week later. On 24 January, President Nixon announced a cease-fire agreement, which was formally signed in Paris on 27 January 1973.

II FIRST QUARTER 1972: WITHDRAWALS AS PLANNED

(U) At the beginning of 1972, USAF forces in Southeast Asia were again, or still, in an ambivalent position, required on the one hand to conduct a full-fledged campaign against an aggressive enemy and on the other, to carry out planned reductions in force. Not unexpectedly, the Administration, at the beginning of this election year, put primary emphasis on its efforts to end the war and its progress in getting the US out of Vietnam. If the President expected to get reelected to a second term he had to satisfy the growing public clamor--as well as his own earlier promises--to end the war. In his 20 January message to Congress he singled out troop withdrawals from Vietnam as the most dramatic accomplishment of his Administration and noted that the US ground combat role had ended.^{1/} On 29 January, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird, reassured a television audience that US troops would not be reintroduced into Vietnam in case of an emergency.

(U) There was need for these reassurances. Despite the fact that some 400,000 troops had been withdrawn since Nixon took office, many people wanted a quicker withdrawal. The state of Massachusetts, for example, had tried in late 1971 to bring suit against the President for his conduct of the war. Above all the public was becoming very resistive over the large outlays still being spent on military and economic aid to South Vietnam. In October 1971 Congress had cut aid to Cambodia by some \$341 Million, and there were moves afoot in 1972 to cut war support funds further.

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(U) Troop reductions to date were real enough, however, (to 139,000 as of 1 January) and in the first week of the new year, Secretary Laird asked JCS for additional force withdrawal plans.^{2/} Before the JCS had time to comply, the President on 13 January announced a reduction to 69,000 by 1 May.^{3/} And on 24 February, Secretary Laird directed planning for a transition force in South Vietnam of 30,000 by 1 July and a more stable force of 15,000 by 1 November.^{4/} In this same directive Secretary Laird made a statement which illustrates the contradictory, all but impossible, tasks the US forces were trying to accomplish during this period:

General Abrams*is faced with a combination of difficult responsibilities in that he must continue his mission of Vietnamization, redeploy half his force in three months, provide timely intelligence, retrograde large quantities of materiel, and accelerate transfer of bases and facilities. The security of our forces must be preserved while these missions are performed.

(U) While the announced withdrawals reassured the US public and Congress, there were no reassurances from the battlefield. All the bold withdrawal attempts were being carried out in the face of a growing threat from an enemy who saw them as paving the way for his planned takeover of South Vietnam. Secretary Laird aptly named the pitfalls that yawned on both sides for the Administration in a January draft memo to a President doubtless only too well aware of them himself:

We must plan against the contingency that total withdrawal will be forced on us prematurely by Congressional action, or . . . failure of will . . . of the South Vietnamese.^{5/}

*General Creighton W. Abrams, Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (COMUSMACV).

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Air Reductions

(U) While warning that US airpower would of course be used to protect remaining US ground forces, both the President and Secretary Laird pointed out that American air assets in early 1972 were down substantially--according to Laird, over 67 percent from the quarter immediately preceding the President's inauguration in 1969.^{6/} There had indeed been USAF reductions, especially in recent months, as the Administration pointed out in answer to criticism of continued US bombing. Completion of Increment 9 of the troop withdrawals in early November 1971 had reduced the number of in-theater US tactical fighter squadrons to 11.^{7/} By mid-December 1971, according to Secretary of the Air Force Robert C. Seamans, Jr., there were only some 350 US attack aircraft left in the area.^{8/} Although no B-52s had been redeployed and the B-52 sortie rate at the beginning of 1972 was 1,000 a month, there had been moves to reduce this.* Under Increment No. 10, carried out from 1 December 1971 to 31 January 1972, the Air Force redeployed 6,265 personnel, including one tactical air support squadron and one C-7 tactical airlift squadron.^{9/} In the 11th redeployment increment to be completed by 30 April USAF forces involved were three Special Operations Squadrons, two C-7 tactical airlift squadrons, and a C-130 tactical

*See E. Hartsook, The Air Force in Southeast Asia: Shield for Vietnamization and Withdrawal, 1971 (TS), (Ofc/AF Hist, 1975) pp 97-103.

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airlift detachment, for a total of 10,590 personnel.^{10/} In making these reductions, top priority was always given to keeping the tactical forces as strong as possible.

(U) Air assets of other services were also shrinking in early 1972. US Marine corps air units had been removed completely by the start of the year. US Army aircraft (fixed wing and rotary wing) declined from 2,098 to 1,015 between 1 January and 31 March.^{11/} The US Navy during this period was maintaining a rate of 1.4 carriers on station per day, as opposed to 3 in early 1971.^{12/}

(U) Despite these reductions, the official emphasis on how greatly air was being cut was not altogether valid. First, Secretary Laird, while directing reduction of US forces to 30,000 in South Vietnam by 1 July, was at the same time preparing to transfer some air units to Thailand for retention of a US bombing capability there. Second, concurrently with the redeployments, some augmentation of air units was taking place. Finally, the JCS and other military leaders disagreed with the optimistic assessments by President Nixon and Secretary Laird on Vietnamization progress and insisted on the vital necessity of retaining adequate US air assets to guard against risk of enemy attack.

Moving Air Units to Thailand

(TS) Redeploying some Air Force units from South Vietnam to nearby Thailand instead of returning them home,* served the Administration's dual objectives of getting US units out of Vietnam and still

*First proposed in memo (TS), SecDef to SAF and JCS, "Air Support in SEA." 13 Apr 71.

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retaining a bombing capability in Southeast Asia. But the move also had many drawbacks. The JCS objected that relocating the tactical electronic warfare squadron from DaNang to Thailand would seriously reduce intelligence collecting capabilities in northern RVN and in the demilitarized zone (DMZ)--two of the areas of greatest potential threat. And while they strongly agreed with the need to retain the bombing capabilities in Thailand, they were worried about the space problem there.^{13/} Thus, three DaNang-based tactical fighter squadrons would have to move to Thailand before the end of June 1972, if the phase-down in SVN was to be implemented and US sortie rates maintained. But Thailand's bases were already crowded with US units and the Thai Government did not look favorably upon raising the US manpower ceiling to accommodate the new influx from South Vietnam.

~~General~~ General Abrams was very clear on the need for the Thai bases however. He said: "The solution does not lie with availability of additional carriers which may or may not be on-station. It points to the need to base sufficient USAF tactical air assets in Thailand to maintain the authorized sortie rates. This points to the need for Thai headroom relief"^{14/} The JCS, responding to his request--as well as to those of Adm. John S. McCain, Jr., Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC) and Gen. John D. Lavelle, Commander, Seventh Air Force--were able to authorize a temporary lifting of the manpower ceiling on 4 April.^{15/} This was to set a pattern for several such increases to accommodate later US augmentations. Even so, the matter of space remained crucial throughout the ensuing critical months, with Air Force and JCS planners constantly having to

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juggle numbers and type of units based in Thailand so as to give priority to those involved in maintaining sortie rates.

(S) Aside from the logistics problems the Thai move entailed for US forces, CINCPAC and MACV objected to the transfer of so much US air support because it meant such a grave loss for South Vietnam. With all Air Force attack squadrons out of South Vietnam by 1 July--as planned--the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (RVNAF) would have no adequate air defense capability and no US quick reaction close air support capability. Overall US tactical air, FAC, and airlift capability in-country would be reduced, and greatly increased responsibility for these turned over to the South Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) who were not yet ready for it. The latter's assumption of an expanded interdiction role would suffer, as would its Improvement and Modernization Program, because continued acceleration and expansion were already overstraining the maintenance system.^{16/} Air support for the proposed RVNAF cross-border interdiction operations* would be degraded, allowing the enemy to build up his support bases unhindered. CINCPAC also feared the move would mean that support for Cambodian Military Equipment Delivery Team (MEDT-C) might be lost.^{17/}

First Augmentations

(S) The first sign of augmentation of air forces, almost incredible in the overall, swift moving tide of "getting out," was a PACAF plan

*See Hartsook, The Air Force in SEA, 1971 (TS); ch. IV.

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called Commando Flash. It was drawn up by USAF commanders in late 1971 (after Increment IX of the phasedown had reduced tactical fighter squadrons to eleven) because they feared contingencies might arise requiring more sorties than remaining squadrons could generate. The plan called for augmenting tactical air forces in Southeast Asia with up to eighteen F-4 aircraft from the 405th Tactical Fighter Wing at Clark Air Base in the Philippines in case of need. Authority to implement the plan rested with JCS.^{18/} In view of the unpopularity of the war, it was to be kept from the public "so as not to arouse them."^{19/}

~~(S)~~ In late December 1971 General Lavelle requested partial implementation of the Commando Flash plan because of the continuing enemy buildup. The JCS responded on 20 December by directing deployment to Thailand of six Commando Flash F-4s and crews, for a period not to exceed 90 days.^{20/} On 20 January General Abrams, warning of possible enemy main force attacks in the near future, requested deployment of all Commando Flash assets if needed. The JCS thereupon directed deployment of up to eighteen F-4s and aircrews for up to 30 days. They also authorized exceeding the Thailand headroom ceiling, but said there was to be no public announcement.^{21/} After new intelligence reports in early February showed further enemy infiltration, the rest of the Commando Flash package deployed from Clark Air Base to Southeast Asia on 8 February, four more airplanes going to each base at DaNang, Ubon, and Udorn.^{22/}

~~(S)~~ As the last of the Commando Flash assets were being sent, planning for a second augmentation plan, Commando Fly, was already being

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initiated by CINCPACAF. This called for deploying ten F-105s and three TFS of F-4Ds (48 aircraft) from Kunsan, Korea, to Korat and Udorn in Thailand. On 19 February MACV asked that one of these F-4 squadrons be moved from Korea to Clark Air Base in order to be quickly available,^{23/} and on 16 March, JCS authorized this, with half of the F-4s destined for DaNang, the other half for Udorn.^{24/} (S) Concern about rising enemy efforts also brought a request for increased B-52 sorties. On 22 January, Admiral McCain added his own warnings about an impending expanded enemy effort to those of General Abrams and asked the JCS for a B-52 sortie surge beyond the current 1,000 a month.^{25/} On 28 January, Headquarters SAC said it was ready to provide the additional sorties and on 5 February the JCS authorized a surge to 1,200 sorties a month and the deployment of eight B-52Ds from Guam to U-Tapao. At the same time the JCS also authorized the transfer of twenty-nine B-52s from the US to Guam and Okinawa, to sustain a temporary increase to 1,500 sorties a month.^{26/} Deploying these additional aircraft, crews, and support personnel from the CONUS raised some very serious questions for SAC and the JCS, above all, the impact that the degrading of some CONUS B-52 sorties would have on the SIOP.^{27/*}

Military Opposition to Withdrawing Air Units Too Soon

(U) Against the background of the massive withdrawal plans and activities and the urgency with which these were directed from

*Single Integrated Operations Plan (for use of USAF/USN strategic nuclear weapons).

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Washington, the air augmentation plan seemed incongruous. But against the very real background of enemy aggressiveness, it only seemed like common sense.

With air the key remaining US weapon with which to counter an enemy attack,* military leaders grew increasingly urgent in opposing further cuts in it. In early January, Gen. John D. Ryan, Chief of Staff, US Air Force (CSAF), warned that plans to reduce tactical air sortie levels from 8,000 to 6,000 in FY 73 would reduce service costs, but would also "increase the risk of effective enemy action against remaining US forces, with an attendant impact on Vietnamization."^{28/} CINCPAC said retention of the US sortie capability was "absolutely essential" and that it might be necessary to provide added forces in Thailand to assure this.^{29/} Secretary Laird acknowledged that lack of a US out-of-country bombing capability would significantly increase the danger of a South Vietnamese failure in the face of an enemy attack.^{30/} Adm Thomas H. Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the future success of Vietnamization could very well hinge on continued US support, including appropriate US air support in the foreseeable future.^{31/} Air Force Secretary Seamans wanted assurance that air units would not be required to maintain high activity levels right up to their withdrawal dates,^{32/} but agreed that if the US was to continue phasing down in a safe way, US air activity in Southeast Asia, even though diminishing, was absolutely essential.^{33/} Secretary of the Army Robert E. Froehlke said "we emphasize that unless the enemy significantly alters his strategy and methods of operation, a continued US interdiction role will be required for some time."^{34/} In March, General Abrams called air

* As of January 1972, US forces in South Vietnam still totaled 139,000 but only about 30,000 GIs, including 8,000 advisers with the RVNAF, were in combat or combat support units. With the President's 13 January announcement, the total number of US forces was to become 69,000 by 1 May.

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power the primary US military resource available during fiscal year 1973 capable of materially influencing the overall situation. Retention of sufficient air assets was "vital to the security of the command and essential to successful completion of the Vietnamization process."^{35/}

(U) Since the JCS and the field commanders were on record through the years as reluctant to approve cutbacks in air power in Southeast Asia,^{36/} their misgivings in the present case seemed only normal. On the other hand, they, and especially the services, had become frankly eager to get out from under the burdens of the Vietnam war and on to other pressing defense priorities.^{37/} The fact that they nevertheless at this point had strong misgivings over cutting back the air weapon, and were even making plans for augmenting it, indicated that their apprehensions outweighed their hopes and those of the Administration.

Vietnamization: Strengthening the VNAF

(U) The counterpart of the Government's inexorable withdrawal policy was its equally forceful emphasis on the Vietnamization program which was to make withdrawal possible. In February Secretary Laird reiterated what he had so often said before, "the chief mission of our forces in South Vietnam continues to be to insure the success of Vietnamization."^{38/} The President pushed particularly hard in this matter. Much progress had been made during 1971, largely in response to his prodding, and this continued into 1972. For example, as a direct result of Nixon's special concern for strengthening the VNAF,* the latter in early 1972 activated four additional UH-1H squadrons 3 months ahead of schedule.^{39/}

*See Hartsook, The Air Force in Southeast Asia, 1971 (TS), pp 47-49.

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VNAF Gains to Date

During the first quarter the VNAF made good progress toward acquiring operational self-sufficiency. It advanced steadily toward total assumption of close air support responsibility in-country, averaging approximately 155 sorties daily.^{40/} Beginning in January, the VNAF Tactical Air Control System (TACS) dispatched aircraft wherever the tactical situation warranted, and deployed advisers with ground combat units throughout South Vietnam. USAF Forward Air Controllers (FACs) gradually withdrew into a shrinking area around Bien Hoa and DaNang, and the US Tactical Air Control Party and Direct Air Support Center progressively reduced to skeleton operations. Prior to the enemy Easter offensive, the VNAF was taking care of over 80 percent of RVNAF airlift requirements. On 1 March it activated a C-7 squadron and its first C-7A Caribou unit, and a few days later the 5th Air Division airlifted an ARVN airborne brigade from Tan Son Nhut to Pleiku with noteworthy efficiency and precision.^{41/} Air defense was still primarily a US mission, but the VNAF began tentative efforts here too, by conducting an air defense training program with F-5s from January to March 1972. It had only been after considerable debate over the feasibility of providing South Vietnam with such a capability that Washington in December 1971 had finally authorized the VNAF additional F-5Es for air defense--in fiscal year 1973 procurement.* As of this first quarter of 1972, South Vietnam's

*Since the F-5 was not an all-weather interceptor, the USAF continued to have the night and all-weather air defense responsibility for SVN. For an account of the controversial effort to provide the VNAF with an air defense role, see Hartsook, The Air Force in Southeast Asia, 1971 (TS), pp 43-47.

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air defense capabilities consisted of two antiaircraft artillery battalions and six F-5As at DaNang.^{42/}

New VNAF Improvement Moves

(S) As reports of enemy buildups and infiltration grew during early 1972 however, so did apprehension over the morale of the South Vietnamese forces and their ability to preserve their still fragile gains. US military officials were well aware how these were being threatened by the drastic US withdrawals. As so often before, the US solution was to enlarge the RVNAF force structure and send more equipment. In the case of the VNAF, the early activation of new squadrons had already helped bring the number of assigned aircraft from 1,222 to 1,392 between January and March.^{43/} In February the JCS approved an additional 2,138 VNAF manpower spaces for fiscal year 1972 and 12,257 more for fiscal year 1973, for a total of 61,453.^{44/} VNAF sortie levels were to increase from the 5,850 a month authorized at the beginning of 1972 to 6,500 by 30 June and to 7,350 by the end of the year.^{45/}

Most of the additional VNAF expansion stemmed from Secretary Laird's October 1971 directive to US planners to provide the RVNAF with an "optimal" interdiction capability for the 1972-73 dry season.^{46/} Fiscal Year 1972 planning had already approved conversion of an AC-47 squadron to an AC-119 squadron for this mission, provision of the Beacon Only Bombing System, and acquisition

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TABLE 1 -- VNAF AIRCRAFT AS OF 1 JANUARY 1972

Type Aircraft	Authorized Sqdn/Acft	Squadrons Currently Activated	Squadrons Operationally Ready	Remarks
<u>Fighter Attack</u>				
F-5 (F-5A)	1/18	1/18	1/18	
A-1	4/96	3/60	3/60	Last activation Nov 72; Last O/R May 73.
A-37	<u>6/144</u> 11/258	<u>5/90</u> 9/168	<u>5/90</u> 9/168	Last activation Oct 72; Last O/R Apr 73.
<u>Air Defense</u>				
MAP Fighter (F-5E)	3/54	0/0	0/0	Activation During FY75, O/R FY75
<u>Gunships</u>				
AC-47	1/18	1/16	1/16	
AC-119	<u>1/18</u> 2/36	<u>1/18</u> 2/34	<u>0/0</u> 1/16	O/R May 72.
<u>Helicopters</u>				
UH-1	16/496	15/465	13/403	Last activation Feb 72; Last O/R Dec 72.
CH-47	<u>2/32</u> 18/528	<u>1/16</u> 16/481	<u>1/16</u> 14/419	
<u>Special Missions</u>				
Composite VC-47, UH-1, U-17	1/10	1/10	1/10	
<u>Reconnaissance</u>				
Composite EC-47, RC-47, U-6, RF-5	1/28	1/19	1/19	
EC-47	<u>1/20</u> 2/48	<u>0/0</u> 1/19	<u>0/0</u> 1/19	Activation Dec 72; O/R Jul 73.
<u>Liaison</u>				
Composite O-1/U-17	8/256	7/195	7/195	Last activation Dec 72; Last O/R Mar 73.
<u>Transport</u>				
C-47	1/16	1/16	1/16	
C-119	1/16	1/16	1/16	
C-123	3/48	3/48	1/16	Last O/R Apr 72;
C-7	<u>3/48</u> 8/128	<u>0/0</u> 5/80	<u>0/0</u> 3/48	Last activation Jul 72; Last O/R May 73.
<u>Training Squadron</u>				
T-41	1/18	1/18	1/18	
Totals	<u>54/1,336</u>	<u>42/1,005</u>	<u>37/698</u>	

Source: USMACV Command History 1971.

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for the VNAF of Phu Cat Air Base.^{47/} In the next year's increases-- as Admiral McCain observed in a letter to the JCS in January--the requirement to develop the interdiction capability accounted for nearly 80 percent of the total add-on costs.^{48/} Under these increases, approved in February, eight maritime patrol aircraft would go to the VNAF to support interdiction operations.^{49/} In addition, the Air Staff in Washington was actively considering numerous other proposals for aiding the VNAF in this role, including: techniques for enhancing night operations, improved gun systems, delivery of CBU-55s from cargo aircraft, and providing sensor relay readout equipment.^{50/}

(U) The most important--and controversial--item was provision of 200 STOL mini-gunships (including 2,100 manning spaces) for VNAF dry season interdiction operations--if the upcoming evaluation tests for it proved successful.* The JCS and the field commanders, as in the past, continued to be dubious about the effectiveness of the STOL aircraft in this role.^{51/} But Secretary Laird, who had championed the program since its inception in 1971, continued to push for it. In a 1 March letter he told Senator Barry Goldwater that in spite of acknowledged problems, he was pressing on with the mini-gunships because of "our effort to do everything possible to improve the VNAF interdiction capability."

*For an account of this mini-gunship program see Hartsook, The Air Force in Southeast Asia, 1971 (TS), Appendix 1, "The Credible Chase Program."

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The President Directs Further VNAF Improvements

➤ All these efforts to beef up the VNAF were not enough for President Nixon in view of the growing enemy threat. With his apparent confidence in the ability of US airpower to stand off the enemy, he seemed to hope the VNAF could perform a similar role for South Vietnam. In mid-March he directed a new review, focusing on "actions that could be taken to ensure ongoing VNAF improvement is adequate to meet priority needs . . ." Besides updated evaluations of VNAF capabilities in close air support, interdiction within South Vietnam, troop lift, and resupply, the President wanted to explore the feasibility of extending VNAF capabilities to missions now performed primarily by US air forces: air defense, Market Time* air surveillance, trail interdiction, intelligence collection, reconnaissance, and medical evacuation. He wanted to consider expanding VNAF out-of-country close air support and interdiction missions instead of further building up the Laos and Cambodia air forces, or alternatively, expanding the latter two forces as a way to relieve the VNAF of these responsibilities. He wanted to examine the "innovative use" of aircraft and weapon systems such as light STOL aircraft and CBU-55** bombs to compensate for South Vietnamese resource and manpower limitations.^{52/}

(U) Forwarding the President's instructions, Secretary Laird asked the JCS, among other things, for a progress review of the Vietnamization of interdiction by 15 June.^{53/} These new plans for

*US Navy anti-infiltration blockade of SVN coast.

**Cluster bomb unit.

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strengthening the VNAF were transmitted a bare 2 weeks before the enemy launched his offensive.

The Threat in Early 1972

(U) While the Administration continued to accelerate withdrawal and Vietnamization programs in the first months of 1972, the military situation in Southeast Asia scarcely warranted the optimism these moves seemed to convey. In the last half of 1971 the enemy had greatly expanded his logistic infiltration system, stockpiled massive supplies, and taken an increasingly aggressive stance against US air operations with his MIGs and SAMs.* All this was continuing in early 1972, with the North Vietnamese apparently more determined than ever to pursue their objectives in the south.

(U) President Thieu had already in December 1971 noted large enemy infiltrations into the highlands of Military Region II, and the ARVN commander of the region had asked that South Vietnam's Airborne Division be sent there.^{54/} In the first week of January, Brig. Gen. George E. Wear, a senior US Army adviser for the region, confirmed intelligence reports that Hanoi's 320th Division was moving down from the DMZ to the B-3 front in the triborder area of Cambodia, Laos, and South Vietnam where some 30-50,000 enemy troops were believed concentrating.^{55/} Truck traffic down the Ho Chi Minh Trail which the US thought it had successfully subdued during most of 1971,** increased to a peak in mid-January with a corresponding high

*See Hartsook, The Air Force in Southeast Asia, 1971 (TS), p 28 ff.

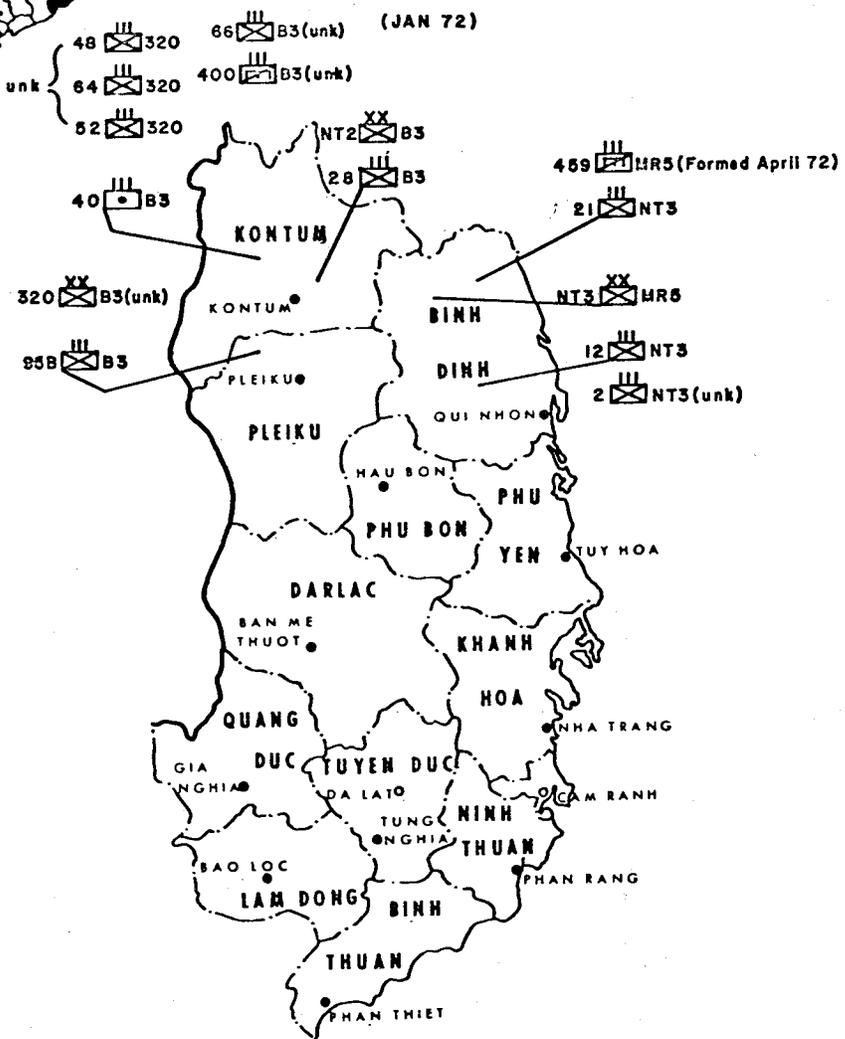
**AF Secretary Seamans said in mid-December 1971 that the North Vietnamese were able to send down the Ho Chi Minh Trail in the 12 months through November 1971 only about half the ammunition, food, and other supplies needed for their forces in the south. (Press conference, 16 Dec 71)

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NVA/VC ORDER OF BATTLE

MILITARY REGION II



Source: MACDI

MAP 1

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rate of countering US air attacks.^{56/} In their usual dry season campaign in northern Laos, the North Vietnamese were threatening Gen. Vang Pao's US-backed guerrilla forces as never before. In Cambodia they continued to harass South Vietnamese and Cambodian forces attacking their LOCs and supply areas.

(U) In spite of all this, there was far from general agreement about the enemy's intentions. Official Administration statements remained optimistic through January and the early part of February, partly no doubt due to wishful thinking, because of all the hopes and efforts invested in Vietnamization. Thus, while predictions of a new Communist offensive continued, Secretary Laird and Secretary of State William P. Rogers still spoke optimistically about what excellent shape South Vietnam was in and how it "could handle any offensive thrown at it."^{57/} In a 22 January draft memo to the President, Secretary Laird said Vietnamization would be successfully concluded by July 1973 (but Admiral Moorer recommended he delete this statement).^{58/} Gen. William C. Westmoreland, now Army Chief of Staff, said in early January that a military takeover had "clearly" been prevented and Vietnamization substantially completed.^{59/} After an inspection tour in the latter part of January, he was less sanguine however, predicting a major Red offensive though still confident the RVNAF could contain it.^{60/}

(U) As January ended other official sources reported increasing signs of an impending enemy offensive, and in early February intelligence reports estimated enemy troop infiltration at as much as 25

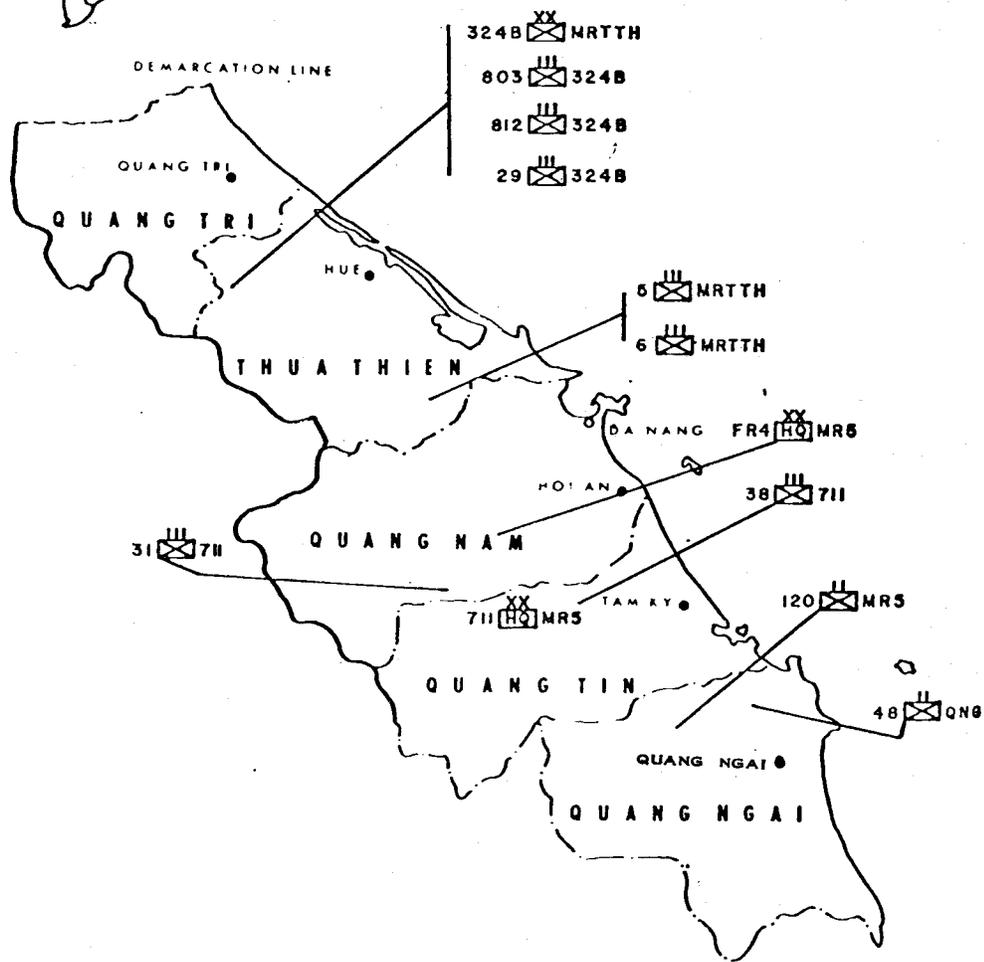
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NVA/VC ORDER OF BATTLE

MILITARY REGION I

(JAN 72)



SOURCE: MACDI

MAP 2

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to 30 percent ahead of the 1971 rate. More ominously, much of the infiltration was in full, organized combat units.^{61/} On 10 February, senior Pentagon officials were telling the New York Times correspondent, William Beecher, that three enemy divisions (as vs. only one as reported in January*)--the 320th, the 324-B and the 304th--had recently moved into positions along the triborder B-3 front area and that a fourth, the 308th, was poised just above the northwest end of the DMZ. They also said some 50,000 replacement troops were reported strung along the infiltration pipeline through Laos.^{62/}

(U) With reports like these, the Secretaries of State and Defense began to speak of the possibility of attacks in the Central Highlands and the President said South Vietnam was "bound to suffer some isolated setbacks, but . . . we and the South Vietnamese are both confident of their ability to handle the North Vietnamese challenge."^{63/} Some newsmen speculated that US officials, nervous about the possibility of attack, were trying to hedge their bets against a surprise attack such as the Tet offensive of 1968, and were overdoing the warnings. The very fact that the North Vietnamese themselves seemed to advertise that they were planning an offensive soon, cast doubt on forecasts of imminent attacks--surprise having always been a major enemy weapon. And even a CINCPAC political/military assessment of 16 March (less than 2 weeks before the offensive began), found it unlikely "there will be any military actions

*North Vietnamese divisions were smaller than the 16,000 men US divisions, having an authorized strength of 12,000, and usually an actual one of 9-10,000.

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taken that might provoke resumption of bombing or slow US redeployment"--at most there might be North Vietnamese small unit actions testing South Vietnam.^{64/}

U.S. Air and the Enemy Threat

(U) The allied response to the disturbing enemy moves in early 1972 consisted primarily of air interdiction operations against the massive input of men and materiel from North Vietnam. With US ground combat forces down to some 30,000 (see p.13), there was little alternative. The annual dry season air interdiction campaign (Commando Hunt VII) pressed both gunship and tactical air attacks against enemy trucks and personnel moving down from the north. At one point Pentagon officials reported US gunships had damaged some 200 trucks a night along the Trail in 2 nights in early February. But they acknowledged this could only slow down enemy traffic, not stop it, as Hanoi merely fed more trucks into the system from the unending supply provided by its allies.^{65/}* In addition, the gunships were soon to come under increasingly mortal AAA attack (see below, pp. 27-28). Tactical air flew intensified sorties against the road and trail network itself, against interdiction points and enemy logistic area targets, suspected troop concentrations, bunker complexes, and against the defenses the enemy had set up to protect his infiltration efforts. The air campaign was supplemented by South Vietnamese ground interdiction operations, including limited cross-

*In a mid-December 1971 briefing, AF Secretary Seamans noted that 6 months previously the big truck depots at Hanoi and Haiphong had been empty, but that US reconnaissance photos now showed 7,000-8,000 more in these areas. (Wash Post, 17 Dec 71.)

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SOURCE: MACDI

MAP 3

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border actions into Cambodia aimed at destroying enemy LOCs and stockpiles--whose defending tactical units had recently been reinforced.

(U) It should be noted at the outset that conditions for air interdiction effectiveness had changed considerably from previous years. US force reductions made the number of US strike sorties available almost 30 percent less than that for Commando Hunt V, the 1971 interdiction campaign. For the same reason, the tactical reconnaissance still available sufficed only to cover critical areas.^{66/} But enemy infiltration road networks had meanwhile increased by some 27 percent,^{67/} making still more territory to be covered by the shrunken reconnaissance effort. Most of these added infiltration routes had been built farther west in Laos, where the North Vietnamese could take greater advantage of heavy jungle canopy--and of new techniques--to hide their movements. Whereas previously allied intelligence could always locate any significant enemy armor movements, many routes now went undiscovered right into the 1971-72 dry season, with all manner of equipment and troops moving down them with relative impunity.^{68/} Above all, in a direct effort to counter the US air interdiction campaign, North Vietnam had drastically increased its air defenses--missiles, antiaircraft artillery, radars, and MIG activity--to a point never seen before. This meant more allied air resources now had to be committed to protect strike aircraft, reducing still further the number of sorties available for interdiction.

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The Enemy Challenge to U.S. Air

④ This intensified enemy effort against US air operations in early 1972 was a continuation of North Vietnam's aggressive stance of the last months of 1971, when its air defense forces began attacking B-52s over Laos and making MIG-21 sweeps against US strike fighters.^{69/} During January 1972 Hanoi fired 30 SAMs and directed fire from 554 AAA guns against Commando Hunt operations over the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos.^{70/} Between 11 and 15 January US air forces responded with an intense effort to locate and neutralize the SAM sites, but were able to neutralize the weapons only temporarily. During this same month North Vietnam also tried very hard to cripple B-52s and tactical fighter bombers called in to support Gen. Vang Pao's endangered forces in the Plain of Jars area of northern Laos. Their efforts included 34 MIG incursions and fire from over 100 AAA installations moved from the eastern part of the Barrel Roll* area specifically to attack Vang Pao.^{71/} Total US Air Force countering efforts for January included 5,148 attack, and 671 B-52 sorties over Laos, and 47 attack sorties over North Vietnam.^{72/}

④ In early February, eight more SAM sites were discovered in Laos.^{73/} In mid-February the President ordered a major air effort

*Interdiction and close air support operations in eastern Laos, and strikes in northern Laos against personnel and equipment from North Vietnam.

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(125 planes according to Craig Whitney in the New York Times of 20 February), primarily against long-range artillery "in and just north of the DMZ." This took place on 16-17 February, and it also targeted enemy rocket sites and logistic complexes and the eight newly discovered SAM sites in the Bat Lake area and elsewhere near the DMZ in North Vietnam. During the operation, 39 SAMs were fired at US crews, downing three USAF aircraft--two F-4s and one F-105.^{74/} MACV described these raids as "limited duration protective air strikes," and pronounced them a success, the bombing having damaged, or destroyed seven long-range 130-mm guns.^{75/} The total number of SAM firings in February was 52, mostly against US reconnaissance and strike aircraft, in what intelligence sources called the biggest buildup of SAM activity ever south of 20° latitude.^{76/} General Lavelle later ascribed this intense air defense activity to the fact that the North Vietnamese were trying to conceal and protect the buildup for their planned invasion, and the only rule they were following--and following it very aggressively--was "shoot down US aircraft."^{77/}

~~()~~ In March there were only six MIG incursions into Laos, and three were shot down. USAF attack sorties in South Vietnam decreased to 271 (from 685 in February) and to 871 (from 943 in February) in Cambodia,^{78/} but increased to 5,644 in Laos (from 4,425 in February) The latter increase was primarily in close air support sorties to aid

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Gen. Vang Pao's forces and ARVN units trying to disrupt enemy supply lines. In Cambodia, where the enemy was rocketing the capital, Phnom Penh, and increasingly taking control in the southeast, allied air strikes sought to counter his efforts to secure his LOCs there for the coming invasion. Over North Vietnam, attack sorties decreased from 182 in February to 132 in March but B-52 strikes increased in all areas--to 689 in South Vietnam, 617 in Laos, and 256 in Cambodia.^{79/}

~~(S)~~ Only 25 SAMs were fired at US aircraft during March, but the number of operational sites stood at 35 and the SAM sites moved further southward, two of them extending the threat envelope to 13 miles inside South Vietnam.^{80/} Similarly, as the enemy shuttled supplies further south into the route structure, he did the same with his AAA weapons. By the end of March there were 748 AAA guns in Laos, a matter of grave concern, especially for allied gunships.^{81/} One AC-130 was shot down by 57-mm AAA fire on 30 March and on the day before a SAM had downed another some 10 miles southwest of Tchepone. In addition, three others had suffered combat damage, reducing the number of operational AC-130s to 13 by the end of March.^{82/} Following this, gunships were withdrawn from all areas of Steel Tiger* except the southeastern corner. To gunship specialists it seemed that the enemy was deliberately trying to restrict his truck-killing operations in order to hasten and increase the flow of supplies in

*Code name since April 1965 for air interdiction operations in southern Laos against personnel and equipment infiltrating South Vietnam from North Vietnam.

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the South.^{83/} There were nine USAF aircraft combat losses during March, all downed by ground fire except one by a SAM: three OV-10s, two AC-130s, two F-4s, one A-1, and one HH-53.^{84/}

Use of Air to Stand Off Enemy Ground Attack

~~████~~ A most important development during this period was the use of air (primarily B-52s) to prevent infiltrating enemy troops from massing and beginning the predicted offensive. In January when enemy forces were reported concentrated in the Central Highlands B-3 front area, 240 B-52 sorties were directed against them.^{85/} Also in that month 150 B-52 sorties carrying CBU's supported the Island Tree program,* aimed at interdicting personnel infiltrating through the Laos trail system.^{86/} With reports of increased enemy infiltration in early February, General Abrams asked the JCS to implement his proposal for a B-52 sortie increase to 1,200 sorties a month (see pp. 6, 12 this study). He argued that the buildup stage of the enemy campaign "provided an excellent opportunity to exploit the power and flexibility of the B-52s by hitting him as hard as possible before he initiates the assault phase of operations."^{87/} The JCS authorized the new rate that same day (5 February) and also directed deployment of twenty-nine more B-52s to Guam and Okinawa to meet an

*A late 1971 program, recommended and approved from Washington for bombing suspected enemy troop concentrations along the Trail and dropping sensors to monitor effectiveness.

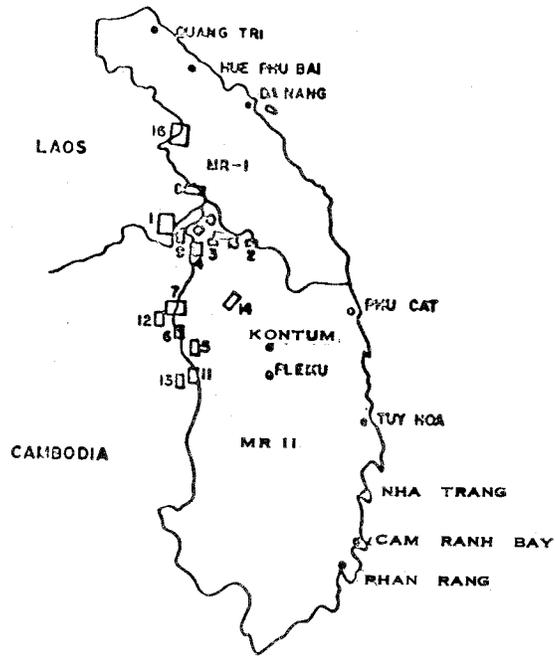
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expected further hike to 1500 sorties a month.^{88/} The bombers deployed on 8 February, the JCS noting that they would become "General Abrams' most important reserve and should be used when he deems necessary."^{89/}

~~67~~ These bombers, as well as the eight sent from Guam on 5 February (see p. 12) were used immediately in a special air offensive ordered by "higher authority" to supplement the continuing effort in the threatened B-3 front area (see pp. 20, 28). In this, General Abrams was ordered to mount a "maximum effort, 'round-the-clock offensive using all available aircraft from all the services" to include tactical aircraft, gunships, and B-52s and to complete the effort before 17 February.^{90/*} As part of this offensive, single B-52 sortie missions were launched every 37 minutes from 10 to 14 February against 135 targets in the B-3 area. The first additional Guam-based sorties participated on 14 February.^{91/} This action was followed by a 60-hour air effort (including sixty-three B-52 sorties) against menacing enemy activity in the western part of Military Region I. General Abrams hoped that the heavy but scattered bombing would thwart enemy plans to move against friendly positions in MR I and MR II in the opening phase of the expected offensive.^{92/} If this failed, MACV officials were reported ready to seek temporary authorization to resume bombing North Vietnam.^{93/}

*The day President Nixon left Washington for his historic trip to California.

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TARGETS IN THE B-3 FRONT

SOURCE: MACV

MAP 4

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(U) Through most of 1971 and continuing into 1972, the field commanders and the JCS had repeatedly requested an expansion of the Rules of Engagement to permit a more aggressive response to the attacks against US aircraft.^{101/} But, although US planes were allowed to make a few specific strikes against certain military targets and supply buildups in North Vietnam, higher authority in Washington consistently refused permission to widen the bombing against the North any further. For example, in January 1972 Seventh Air Force reconnaissance intelligence photographed some 60 tanks a few miles above the DMZ which subsequently participated in the "Easter invasion." General Lavelle "wanted to hit those tanks in the worst way,"^{102/} but the Rules of Engagement would not permit him to do so. The only relaxation in the rules was a 26 January 1972 authorization to use antiradiation missiles against the enemy's ground-controlled intercept (GCI) radar sites. Both General Abrams and General Lavelle had urgently requested this authority ever since the enemy began (late December 1971) refining the linkage between the GCIs and SAM firings in a way that drastically reduced warning time for US aircraft and greatly increased their vulnerability.^{103/}

The Role of Negotiations

(U) The Administration's seemingly unreasonable refusal to allow a more aggressive US response to enemy activity stemmed from President Nixon's dual policy of pursuing negotiations as well as

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military campaigns in his efforts to end the war. Unknown to the US public, he had actively engaged in secret peace talks with Hanoi during the latter half of 1971 and on into 1972. As he was later to say, in revealing these talks, "although there was evidence already last October that the enemy was building up for a major attack, yet we deliberately refrained from responding militarily, continuing patiently with the Paris talks, because we wanted to give the enemy every chance to reach a negotiated settlement."^{104/*} The Administration of course had good reason to pursue negotiations. A settlement would help solve their biggest worries: how well the South Vietnamese forces would "stand up" in the face of an offensive, how to cope with increasing domestic pressure to end the war, how to continue paying for the war.

*Nixon's statement tallies with Tad Szulc's informative account of the secret negotiations ("How Kissinger Did It," Foreign Policy, No. 15, Summer 1974), based, according to the author, on heretofore unpublished accounts of the negotiations and a lengthy secret State Department document on the subsequent peace agreement. Szulc says President Nixon accompanied his October 1971 peace offer to Hanoi with a proposal for another secret session on 1 November in Paris. The North Vietnamese agreed to such a meeting for 20 November, but on the 17th begged off, saying Le Duc Tho, their chief negotiator, was ill. Although this was apparently true, they offered no alternate date or negotiator. There were no further messages from Hanoi in 1971, making it appear, in retrospect, that the North Vietnamese at this point wished to proceed on the military track only. According to Szulc, the Administration became so alarmed over Hanoi's continued silence and its buildup that on 25 January 1972 the President made public the past secret negotiations, and on the following day a private message was sent to Hanoi indicating readiness to resume the secret talks. On 14 February Hanoi agreed to resume talks on 15 March, but on 6 March asked postponement until 15 April--well after the offensive began.

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(U) Funds to continue the war constituted the biggest problem. As Secretary Laird told the President in a January draft memo, both Congress and the US public would balk at continuing present outlays for the war. Support costs for fiscal years 1973-1976 would be \$15 billion and could go to \$18 billion if hostilities increased, not including costs of US military activity such as air operations. A negotiated settlement would save more than \$3 billion in aid. But even with a settlement, the United States would still have to support South Vietnam for the indefinite future, because North Vietnam (unlike the US) was determined to continue the war. If the US did not continue its commitment to South Vietnam, Secretary Laird said there were only two alternatives: the US would have to risk putting its basic interests and objectives in Southeast Asia in serious jeopardy, or it would somehow have to persuade Russia and China to reduce or eliminate their aid to North Vietnam.^{105/} For their replacement of Hanoi's supplies as fast as the US destroyed them, their provision of SAMs, tanks, and other weapons, was probably the major factor undercutting the US effort to maintain its position.

~~1~~ The President was only too aware of the alternatives. In addition to the Hanoi negotiations, he was preoccupied during the first weeks of 1972 with the much larger negotiating plans involved in his mid-February trip to Peking and a planned subsequent visit to Moscow. In both places he sought improved relations, especially in trade, and hoped to exploit these new ties to Moscow and Peking to reduce their aid to Hanoi and to help bring about a negotiated peace. Therefore, the Peking/Moscow visits, with their larger objectives, not unexpect-

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edly impinged on the rules governing US air operations in the war. Thus, on 5 February Admiral Moorer told Admiral McCain (who had just forwarded yet another urgent request for increased operating authorities) he expected soon to be able to adjust the air authorities requested--the present time restraints were related to the President's China trip. He went on to say that if a tactical emergency developed between 17 February (the date of the President's departure) and 1 March, the restrictions would "no doubt be lifted." And he softened his reply by adding:

I assure you that your requirements, evaluations, and recommendations are being brought to the attention of our [CINC]. He is giving Southeast Asia much personal attention despite his many activities elsewhere. The difficulties inherent in the double task of defending against a major enemy attack while, at the same time executing a rapid withdrawal of US forces is well-recognized by all the Joint Chiefs who will render all support possible.^{106/}

(U) The restraints were not actually lifted until the enemy offensive began at the end of March, although General Lavelle later testified that in the weeks preceding the offensive "higher authority had recommended, encouraged, and then commended an extremely liberal targeting policy, well beyond the language of the Rules of Engagement."^{107/} (italics added) This was indeed true.* But far from being formally given expanded authority, General Lavelle was returned to Washington on 26 March and relieved of his command for alleged violations of the

*For more details, see Hartsook, The Air Force in SEA, 1971, pp 26-36.

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Rules of Engagement and falsified reports on these actions.* He was succeeded as Seventh Air Force Commander by Gen. John W. Vogt, Jr., on 10 Apr 72.

(U) In this stringency on rules, ironically, the President's eagerness for negotiations ultimately worked to the harm of his overall purpose in Vietnam. For despite suggestions by Senator Harold E. Hughes and others that secret peace negotiations with Hanoi were jeopardized by General Lavelle's bombing in the North, Hanoi (as we have seen) avoided further talks and kept to its plans for a military offensive. Whereas the US field commanders' inability (because of the ROE) to bomb the visible buildup of tanks and weapons in southern North Vietnam obviously contributed to the initial success the enemy achieved in the subsequent invasion.

(U) To summarize, the prevailing emphasis in US Vietnam war activities during the first quarter of 1972 centered on "getting out." Despite the growing evidence of hostile enemy intent, the withdrawal plans went forward. Perhaps bedazzled by its diplomatic successes with Peking and Moscow, the Administration appeared confident of its ability to carry out its plans for disengaging in Southeast Asia as well. Although reports of enemy activity caused concern, especially in the field, Washington tended to downgrade the seriousness of the

*This came about as the result of an Air Force sergeant's letter to his Congressman, expressing concern over US bombing of North Vietnam when this was forbidden. The charges then made against General Lavelle aroused much violent and differing response. Most of the press condemned him out of hand, but others, including various Senators, felt the blame was not his alone--that he had acted as he did with the tacit consent of higher military officials. For further details, see US Senate hearings on nomination of Lavelle, Abrams, and McCain, Sep 1972.

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threat and seemed to think it could handle whatever came.* With a certain amount of wishful thinking, no doubt, in this election year, it still banked heavily on the Vietnamization program and, ultimately, some form of negotiated settlement. It also still did have a "rearguard" air weapon which--as things turned out--was all that staved off a severe defeat of its plans, both in Vietnam and at home.

*According to Tad Szulc's analysis ("How Kissinger Did It," Foreign Policy, Summer 1974, p. 35), "What is unexplained is why the Nixon Administration failed to perceive in time what was happening. Kissinger himself admitted later that only on Easter Sunday did he realize that Saigon was facing a full-fledged offensive and that the North Vietnamese were "going for broke" in a last desperate attempt to smash the South Vietnamese Army before a peace settlement . . . the overwhelming concern in the White House was the just-concluded trip to China and the approaching Moscow summit. As a senior White House official remarked at the time, Vietnam was a "cruel side show" in the Administration's new worldwide policies."

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UNCLASSIFIED**III THE EASTER INVASION AND THE U.S. RESPONSE, APRIL 1972**

(U) Despite the heavy air strikes in preceding months to blunt an offensive, despite the Commando Flash augmentations of US air power, it became apparent towards the end of March that these efforts would not suffice to prevent a major enemy thrust. This was only too evident when the invasion finally began on the night of 29/30 March. For its size and scope soon revealed it as probably the most serious threat of the entire war, endangering not only Vietnamization and the Thieu government, but some 70,000 remaining Americans as well. North Vietnam threw almost its entire strength into the attack: eight North Vietnamese divisions, with large numbers of tanks, surging in successive waves across the DMZ and into Military Regions I, II and III of South Vietnam.

(U) With this entry of the North Vietnamese divisions into the south, the air war entered a new phase. Whereas most resources had been dedicated to the interdiction mission in the first quarter of 1972, once the offensive began, all available strike forces in Thailand, RVN, and the South China Sea were pressed into service to help ARVN cope with the invading forces.* For with US ground forces all but gone, air remained the only support the United States could give its beleaguered ally. But what really made this a new phase of the air war was the fact that, with the invasion, the previous rules

*Since it appeared unlikely that this shift in mission would be reversed, the Commander, Seventh Air Force, declared the air interdiction campaign against the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos, Commando Hunt VII, terminated on 31 March 1972. (Commando Hunt VII (S), p. 61.)

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of engagement (based on treating the conflict as a civil war), the agreements forbidding bombing of the north, and the winding down of the US air role--all came to an end. Once again US air could move against North Vietnam itself. A whole new air war was beginning.

U.S. Air Augmentations

~~(U)~~ In undertaking his massive offensive, the enemy could plainly see--and had probably counted on--the decreasing ability of US air to protect South Vietnamese forces. US Marine Corps air assets had been completely removed and those of the other services were drawing down rapidly. But Hanoi was probably not aware of the foresightedness of US commanders in drawing up secret air augmentation plans. (See Chapter II.) And it certainly underestimated the speed with which the United States could marshal its world-wide air resources in response--to the extent of permitting a 340 percent increase in tactical air sorties in South Vietnam during the month after the attack began.^{1/} This rapid and massive US air buildup unquestionably played a role in preventing a major military disaster in the first part of the enemy offensive.

(U) When the North Vietnamese offensive broke, Admiral McCain ordered Gen. Lucius D. Clay, Jr., CINCPACAF, to execute the second augmentation plan, Commando Fly,* (see p. 6), and on 1 April, eighteen Commando Fly F-4Ds of the 35th TFS from Kunsan, Korea deployed

*Typically, the Secretary of Defense cautioned US commanders to say that the move was a "limited and temporary realignment of tactical warfare assets to maintain the capability to protect our personnel during the withdrawal." (Msg (TS/SPECAT), 311814Z Mar 72, CINCPAC to CINCPACAF, cited in Nicholson, The USAF Response to the Spring 1972 Offensive (TS), p 34.

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to Southeast Asia, half to Ubon and half to DaNang. At the same time a squadron of F-4Cs deployed from Okinawa to Kunsan to replace the 35th. But it soon became clear to the field commanders that all the available airpower in the area, including the recent augmentations, could do no more than slow the enemy down until additional support arrived. Since it was also pretty clear that President Nixon would not reintroduce US ground forces to provide such support, a rapid buildup of tactical air could be the only answer.

When Admiral McCain and General Abrams asked General Lavelle on 4 April what further air augmentation he needed,^{2/} he asked that 18 of the remaining 26 Commando Fly aircraft be sent to Ubon and the other 8 to DaNang, and these assets were alerted for deployment that same day. He also wanted the F-105 Wild Weasel (Iron Hand) strength at Korat increased to twenty-two UE aircraft, the KC-135 strength in Southeast Asia raised to 48, and the EB-66 total increased to 21.^{3/}

On 5 April, General Abrams forwarded via CINCPAC an urgent request for these and other tactical air deployments.^{4/} That same day the JCS set up a string of aircraft deployments known collectively as Constant Guard--after a TAC plan bearing that nickname. In the first of these, they directed that twelve F-105G aircraft of the 561st TFS from McConnell Air Force Base (AFB), Kansas, be sent to Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base (RTAFB), Thailand.^{5/} They also ordered General Ryan, CSAF, to deploy the 334th and 336th TFS immediately from Seymour-Johnson AFB, North Carolina, to Ubon RTAFB, Thailand, for 90 days.^{6/} Two days later, on 7 April, they ordered

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TABLE 2 -- SOUTHEAST ASIA AUGMENTATION STATUS

		<u>TACAIR</u>			
<u>BEDDOWN LOCATION</u>	<u>TYPE</u>	<u>ASSIGNED UE</u>	<u>AUGMENTATION FORCE</u>	<u>SOURCE</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Da Nang	F4D	18	18	Korea (COMMANDO FLY)	36
	F4E	36			36
	F4 B/J USMC		27	Iwakuni	27
Udonn	F4J		12	Kaneohe	12
	F4D	42	18	Clark (COMMANDO FLASH)	60
	F4E		36	Homestead/Eglin	36
Ubon	F4D	66			66
Korat	F4E		36	Seymour	36
	F4E	36			36
Total		198	147		345
<u>ARC LIGHT</u>					
U-Tapao	B52D	48	6	CONUS	54
Andersen	B52D		58	CONUS	58
	B52G		28	CONUS	28
Total		48	92		140
<u>SUPPORT</u>					
Korat	F-105	14	5	Kadena	19
	F-105		12	McConnell	12
	EB-66	15	6	CONUS	21
U-Tapao	KC-135A	36	10	CONUS	46
Kadena	KC-135A	15	23	CONUS	38
Andersen	KC-135A	2		CONUS	2
Clark	KC-135A		12	CONUS	12
Total		82	68		150

NOTE: KC-135Q, special radio relay, and reconnaissance aircraft are not included in KC-135 totals.

Source: CINCPAC Command History 1972.

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four additional EB-66 crews sent from Shaw AFB, SC, to augment the 42d Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron (TEWS) at Korat to a strength of 21 aircraft.^{7/} In the second phase of Constant Guard, the JCS on 26 April directed General Ryan and the Tactical Air Command to deploy the 308th TFS and the 58th TFS from Homestead and Eglin AFBs, respectively, to Thailand.^{8/} Authority was granted to exceed the manpower ceiling in Thailand to accommodate all these augmentations.^{9/}

(U) The overall air effort was enlarged by the arrival in early April of two additional US Navy aircraft carriers, the Midway and the Saratoga, with their 130 aircraft. Two US Marine Corps (USMC) F-4 squadrons based in Japan were also ordered to leave for DaNang as soon as the offensive struck. A second Marine F-4 squadron arrived from Hawaii on 15 April, and the two units formed a new Marine Air Group (MAG) 15. A month later, two squadrons of Marine A-4s also deployed from Japan and began operations from Bien Hoa Air Base.^{10/}

B-52 Augmentations

When he asked for additional tactical air units, General Abrams also requested more B-52 support. Hence on 3 April Admiral McCain asked the JCS for a B-52 sortie surge in Southeast Asia to the maximum supportable level above 1500 sorties a month until the current

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situation stabilized.^{11/} Admiral Moorer, CJCS, approved an increase to 1800 sorties a month by 10 April--and more B-52 SIOP degrades in order to provide the means. As a result Headquarters SAC ordered 20 more B-52Ds to Andersen between 4-7 April.^{12/} On 8 April, with the situation in Southeast Asia continuing to deteriorate, the JCS authorized still another increase to 1,890 sorties a month and deployment of all available B-52Ds in the United States to Guam. So six more B-52Ds went to Guam between 8-12 April, leaving SAC with no CONUS B-52D force--for the SIOP or otherwise--except for five of the aircraft at the Replacement Training Unit (RTU) at Castle AFB, California.^{13/}

~~(S)~~ A few hours later that same day, the JCS asked Headquarters SAC the maximum number of B-52s, other than B-52Ds, that could be configured for operations in Southeast Asia. The reply was twenty-eight B-52Gs, fifteen B-52Hs, and seventeen B-52Fs. Because of the urgent situation facing allied forces in South Vietnam, the JCS later that same day directed deployment of twenty-eight contingency-modified B-52Gs to Andersen and six KC-135s to Kadena. The necessary SIOP degrades were again authorized.^{14/} These additional aircraft brought the B-52 sortie rate in Southeast Asia up to 2,250 a month--1,170 from U-Tapao, 1,080 from Guam. On 19 April, a further sixteen KC-135s and 30 crews moved to U-Tapao, and another 12 crews to Kadena. By the end of April, the SAC aircraft alert force was down to 63 of its required 150 B-52s and 96 of its 209 KC-135s.^{15/}

U.S. Air Operations Support ARVN

(U) The unexpected size of the enemy offensive created a very critical situation for ARVN and, because their air support requirements

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were far beyond the VNAF's capabilities, the US Command immediately diverted all its air assets to help them. The enemy attack came in successive phases in three main areas: Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces in the northern part of Military Region I--where a 3-division invasion began on 30 March; the An Loc area in Military Region III, 60 miles north of Saigon, where the enemy made a second surprise attack with two divisions a week later; and the Kontum area in Military Region II, where he staged a third and final surprise attack with three divisions some 2 weeks after that on 24 April.^{16/}

The Attack in Military Region I

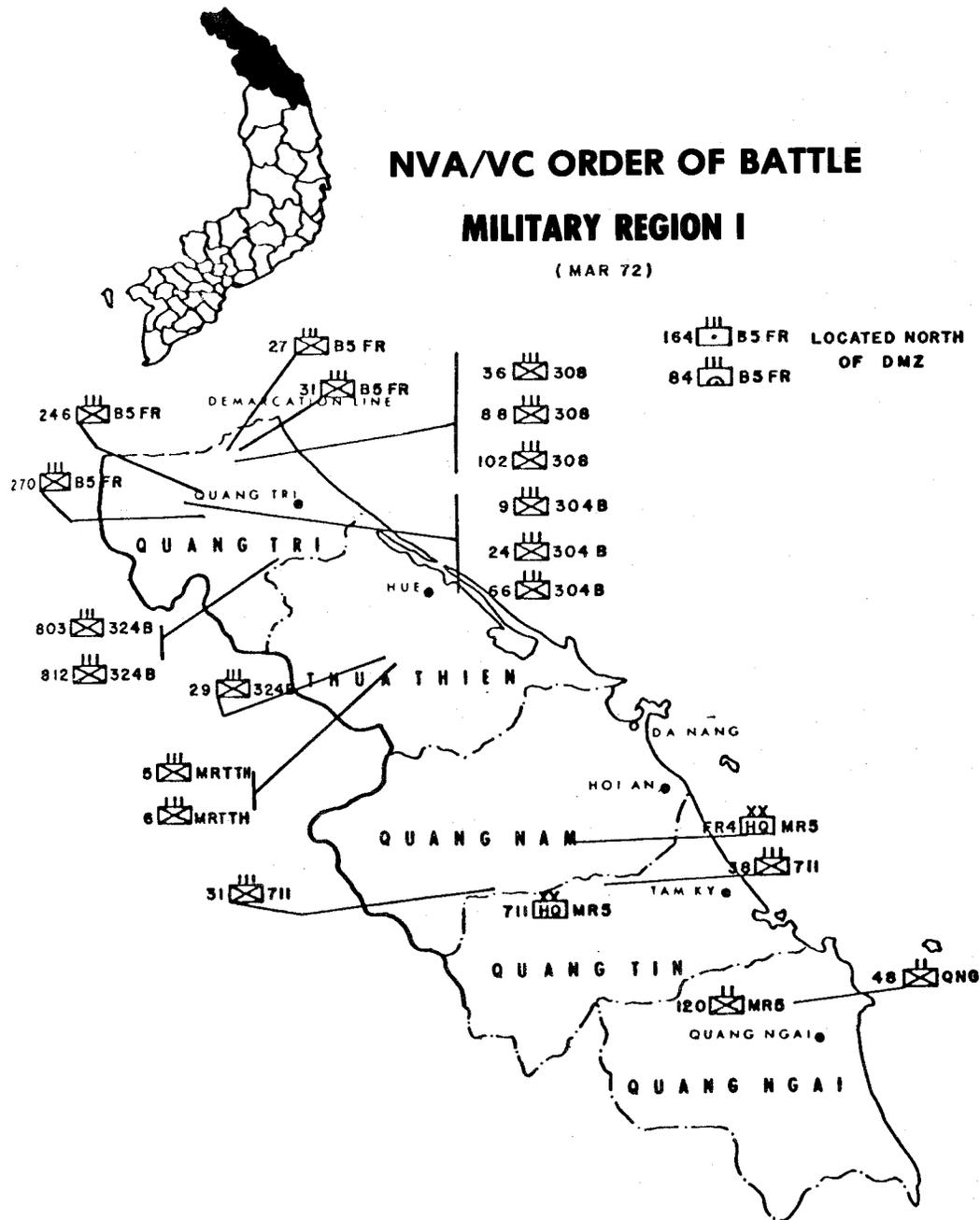
(U) In the initial attack in Military Region I on 30 March, the adverse weather of the Northwest monsoon season hampered countering air efforts to such an extent it almost seemed the enemy had planned it that way. With coordinated enemy attacks against the fire support bases and enemy tanks present almost everywhere, the South Vietnamese forces needed air support desperately. But much as USAF gunships and FACs tried to respond, the weather allowed them to do so only for brief periods. The only usable air power consisted of B-52 and tactical air missions using Combat Skyspot and Long Range Navigation (LORAN), which were not too effective under the conditions. The enemy, hidden from the air by heavy clouds, fog, and drizzle, kept up his pressure and within a week the outlying South Vietnamese bases were totally overrun and friendly units forced back to the cities of Dong Ha and Quang Tri. In these first days, air

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NVA/VC ORDER OF BATTLE

MILITARY REGION I

(MAR 72)



Source: MACDI

MAP 5

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strikes were also hampered by the disorganized retreat of friendly forces. No one knew their exact location and this necessitated the establishment of large no-fire zones. From Dong Ha and Quang Tri, the South Vietnamese fought to stem the enemy assault, supported by US air strikes and intensified naval gunfire (unaffected by the low visibility conditions).^{17/} But only when the weather began to improve on 5 April were allied air resources able to engage the enemy tank and truck columns. As the weather cleared and battle lines stabilized, the air strikes grew more effective and there was a general decrease of enemy-initiated activity.^{18/}

(c) By 14 April, ARVN forces began a series of limited counter-offensive actions, with US and VNAF air providing close air support. At first it seemed this might be a feasible way to regain lost territory, but too often ARVN failed to follow up on advantages gained by air and little headway was made. The North Vietnamese continued to assemble forces and make preparations for heavy attacks on both Dong Ha and Quang Tri, and the attacks became a reality on 27 April. Again the weather, with 50 foot ceilings, severely restricted air support.^{19/} Nevertheless, Gen. Hoang Xuan Lam, the commander in Region I, directed a tactical emergency and requested additional tactical air and B-52 support. As the attack intensified, so did the requests for air support.^{20/} The heavy, close-quarter fighting at this time also signalled a return to close-in bombing, i.e.,

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striking targets located closer than the normal 3 kilometer separation from friendly troops. Thus, of 220 B-52 targets (primarily troop concentrations) struck in the Quang Tri battle up to 3 May, 29 were designated as close-in.^{21/}

(U) On 28 April the situation deteriorated as friendly forces retreated to the Quang Tri Combat Base northwest of the city, heavily supported by friendly artillery, tanks, and US Army helicopter gunships which destroyed 17 tanks.^{22/} In a final enemy advance on Quang Tri City early the next morning, ARVN forces, aided by VNAF and US tactical air, repeatedly repelled assaults while inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy. In one timely and devastating operation, a FAC using flare light, directed strike after strike on the enemy, with the result that the attack was beaten off and five enemy tanks destroyed.^{23/} At this time, Brig. Gen. Thomas W. Bowen, USA, Deputy Senior Adviser to the region, estimated that Quang Tri was threatened by the equivalent of four North Vietnamese divisions--about 40,000 men--who outnumbered government forces 3 to 1.

(U) The next day the situation worsened and South Vietnamese Marine Corps elements began evacuating the combat base across the river from Quang Tri City. ARVN engineers, in a moment of panic, destroyed the Quang Tri bridge before the Marines had entirely withdrawn however, and tactical air and naval gunfire had to complete the destruction of abandoned friendly artillery pieces, tanks, ammunition storage areas and POL dumps.^{24/} By the next morning (1 May) the Marines

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still held the west side of the city, but all other ARVN resistance north, east, and west of the Citadel had disappeared. US advisers continued to coordinate tactical air and naval gunfire, but adverse weather conditions prevented effective air support, and enemy armor assaults continued. ^{25/}

Enemy Anti-Aircraft Measures

Throughout the Quang Tri offensive, high intensity enemy AAA and SAM deployment threatened both tactical air and B-52 support, with pilots reporting the situation as bad as over Hanoi.

Lt. Col. John P. O'Gorman, commander of the 421st Tactical Fighter Squadron at DaNang said:

The SA-2 missiles are a major threat for the first time ever inside South Vietnam. They [the NVA] are towing anti-aircraft guns behind trucks right down the road and then they fire SAMs at us to force us down into the anti-aircraft fire. ^{26/}

On one day during the first days of the offensive, the enemy launched 24 SAMs from the DMZ area at an F-4, an OV-10, a Navy A-6, and three B-52 cells. These were not effective, but on 8 April an SA-2 damaged the left wing and fuselage of a B-52--despite which it landed safely at DaNang AB. ^{27/} Further, on 29 April the enemy introduced the Soviet Strela (SA-7) missile for the first time, firing it at an F-4 north of Quang Tri City. An infrared homing missile operated by ground troops against any low level flight operations at low or

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moderate speed, this new weapon posed a serious threat to FACs and to helicopters flying Search and Rescue (SAR) missions in the region.^{28/}* During April, Seventh Air Force established 12 high threat areas in Military Region I--raising the number later to 19.

The Attack in Military Region III

(U) A week after the Quang Tri attack, the North Vietnamese launched the second stage of their offensive, in Military Region III, in Binh Long province. Outlying positions and the city of An Loc began to receive enemy fire on 5 April and a sizeable ground force threatened Quan Loi airfield which fell the next day after USAF and VNAF helicopters had evacuated 138 Special Forces defenders, including 8 Americans.^{29/} The main part of the enemy thrust, by at least two regiments supported by tanks, was directed against Loc Ninh, the district capital. Here, almost immediately two ARVN infantry battalions, one cavalry squadron, and one ranger border defense battalion, plus the supporting artillery were enveloped and rendered ineffective, only some 150 survivors making their way to An Loc.^{30/} Two compounds

*Since no US countermeasures had yet been developed against this missile, there was high interest in securing one or more of them for exploitation in the US for this purpose. On 21 May, MACV informed CINCPAC that a controlled source had offered to sell a complete SA-7 for \$50,000 and the Department of the Army had approved the purchase. However, on 24 May, the commander of the Seventh Fleet revealed that two SA-7s had been captured intact by the 39th Rangers (ARVN) during operations the day before. One of these was immediately sent to the US, the other being retained in South Vietnam. (CINCPAC Command History, 1972 (TS), Vol II, p 552.)

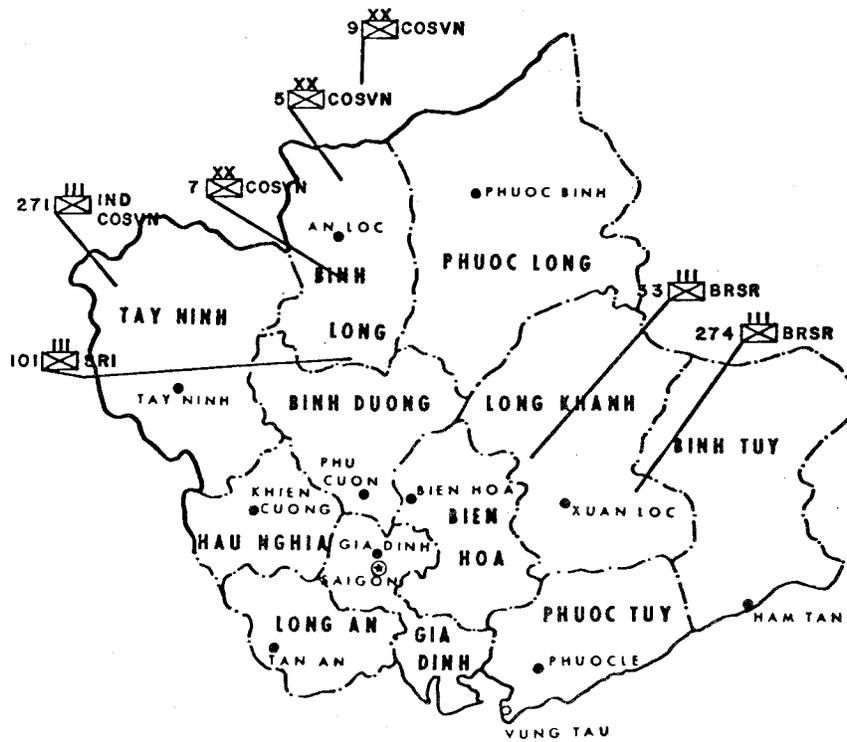
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NVA/VC ORDER OF BATTLE

MILITARY REGION III

(MAR 72)



SOURCE: MACDI

MAP 6

~~SECRET~~

at either end of the town held out for 2 more days, beating back attacks mostly with USAF/VNAF tactical air and gunships, including well placed CBU strikes, and causing high enemy casualties.^{31/} On the 7th the situation became desperate for the remaining four ARVN companies however and by early evening hostile forces engulfed the area completely. Maj. Gen. James T. Hollingsworth, Commanding General, Third Regional Assistance Command (TRAC), told General Abrams the town would have fallen on 5 April had it not been for the magnificent support of the Seventh Air Force and the brilliant direction of one of the advisers calling in the strikes.^{32/}

(U) As the enemy took over, many ARVN personnel fled into a nearby rubber plantation. The rest, including some Americans, fled toward An Loc, with tactical air providing almost their only protection against pursuing VC/NVA forces. These aircraft roamed over the area and struck targets pointed out by FACs and radioed in by some of the elements on the ground. An American infantry adviser to the 18th Division, Capt. Marvin C. Zumwalt, USA, estimated that only 790 of 1000 troops in the area reached An Loc, but said those who did so made it because of tactical air.^{33/}

(U) The whole enemy thrust now began to move toward An Loc. B-52s followed the NVA troops, striking at enemy forces which had cut off a South Vietnamese relief column to the south, but directing most of their strikes at the outskirts of An Loc where the defenders were very hard pressed. Here they concentrated their attacks against

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enemy tanks, troops, and moving supplies and equipment, with some 30 percent of their bombing again close in.^{34/}

(U) On 13 April the battle of An Loc began in earnest and by midday the enemy controlled half the city. But in spite of intense AAA fire, continued air attacks kept the enemy from overrunning the defenses. The strikes stopped tanks, destroyed supply vehicles, and repelled invading troops. Of 369 verified enemy killed on the 13th, 200 were credited to air--some 100 of them and 3 or 4 tanks destroyed as they inadvertently passed through a B-52 target box during a strike.^{35/} As General Hollingsworth reported to General Abrams at this time, "massive air support of all types tipped the scales in our favor."^{36/} On 15 April, the enemy began another massive drive and again, despite heavy AAA fire (which, in General Hollingsworth's words, "made flying most gamey"), tactical air flew all day over the city, destroying nine out of ten tanks that afternoon, and flying throughout the night. Not surprisingly, a CAS report of this date said the heavy enemy pressure in the general area appeared "to have been defused by heavy air strikes."^{37/} It was at this point--after two strong attacks had been repulsed--that the battle of An Loc turned into the siege of An Loc.

The Siege

(U) The main factor in the siege was the enemy's steady intensification of his indirect fire. The 1300 daily incoming rounds now

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increased, coming from all directions and from all kinds of weapons--howitzers, rockets, mortars, and other recoilless weapons. The havoc thus wrought, the refugee-crowded conditions, the shortages and medical and sanitary problems in the city made holding out an enormous task. At the same time that he ruthlessly used his own firepower, the enemy systematically tried to destroy that of the South Vietnamese, cutting off their relief column and capturing or destroying most of ARVN's ordnance and firing ammunition storage areas, and leaving it with only 60 and 30 mm mortars. Tactical air tried, not always successfully, to spot and destroy the captured ARVN weapons before they could be turned back on their former owners. For example, on 17 April, after a FAC spotted four trucks hauling four 155-mm howitzers, a Spectre, subsequently aided by tactical air, destroyed all four trucks and weapons.^{38/}

(U) The central importance of aerial resupply now became crucial. Without it, An Loc would fall. From 7-19 April, VNAF and US CH-47s, C-123s, and HU-1B helicopters flew 93 sorties delivering 301 tons of supplies. But soon these became primary targets for enemy gunners, and when the latter shot down a VNAF CH-47 on 12 April, helicopter supply ended.^{39/} The VNAF C-123s continued to fly low level para-drops, but when one of them crashed on 18 April on its 40th sortie, Saigon also halted their use in resupply efforts.

(U) On 15 April the USAF, at MACV's request, had initiated a series of low-level, daylight air drops to the besieged ARVN forces. Using C-130s and the container delivery system, the deliveries were satisfactory, but all aircraft suffered damage from ground fire, and when one went down on 18 April (the fifth C-130 loss since March), these

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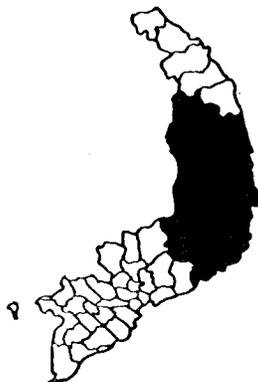
drops were also terminated. The USAF then tried high altitude drops, using the Ground-Radar Aerial Delivery System (GRADS). This was completely unsuccessful because of parachute malfunctions (traceable directly to unskilled South Vietnamese packers) and on 23 April the USAF reluctantly went back to the low-level technique.^{40/} Once more the C-130s all received damage and when one exploded and crashed on 26 April, the Air Force again abandoned the daylight drops, scheduling all remaining deliveries at night. Because of poor nighttime visibility and the smallness of the drop zone, however, only a very low percentage of the supplies were recovered by the ARVN. Other innovative techniques were tried but with little success. As of the end of April, the situation bred fear and hopelessness in besieged An Loc.^{41/}

The Attack in Military Region II

(U) While the first two stages of the North Vietnamese offensive turned into major battles before mid-April, the third and final stage, in Military Region II, did not develop into a major engagement until the last week of that month. This late start was attributed at least in part to the massive US air attacks earlier in the month on troops known to be massing there (691 B-52 sorties in Military Region II during April)^{42/} which had kept the enemy off balance.^{43/} Despite these setbacks, the enemy launched artillery, mortar, and tank attacks on 23 April against the towns of Tan Canh and Dak To north of Kontum. A Pave Aegis* Spectre gunship engaged

*105 mm howitzer equipped.

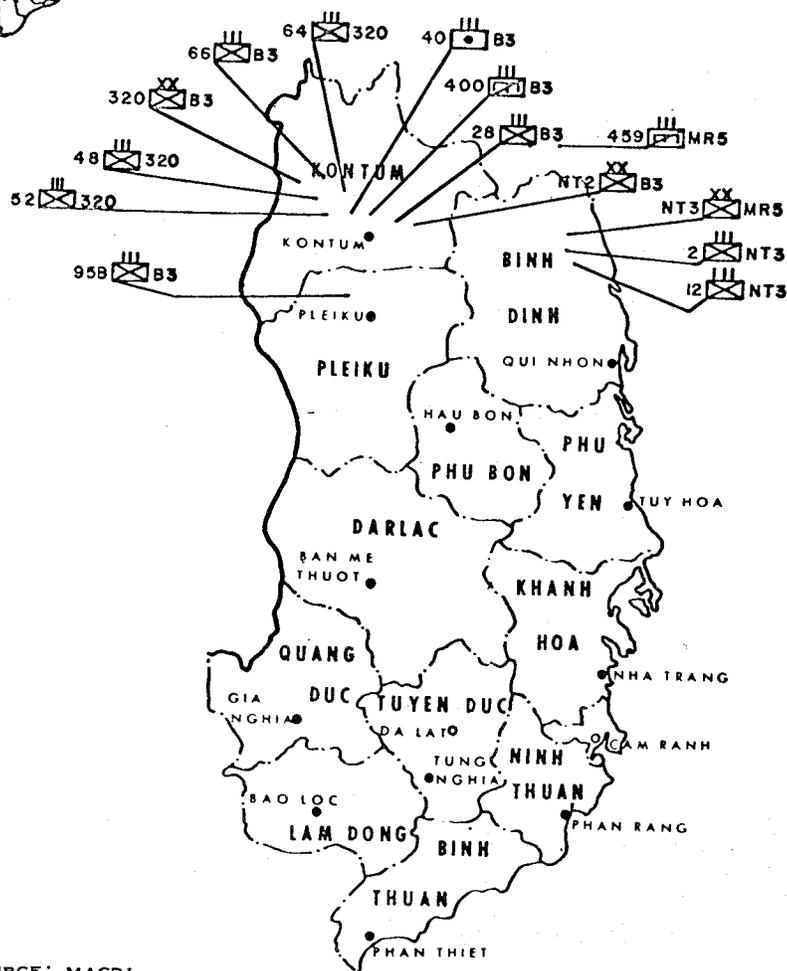
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NVA/VC ORDER OF BATTLE

MILITARY REGION II

(MAR 72)



SOURCE: MACDI

MAP 7

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some 10 of an estimated 20 tanks that evening, destroying 1 and damaging 4. Another Spectre engaged the tanks throughout the night, rendering at least seven of them useless.*

(U) By dawn of the next day the remaining tanks had surrounded and quickly overran Tan Canh, virtually unopposed by elements of the ARVN 22d Division. They then moved on and by 2:30 in the afternoon had Dak To under control. Retreating ARVN 22d Division troops left behind twenty-three 105-mm howitzers, seven 155-mm field pieces, ten M-41 tanks, and 16,000 rounds of ammunition.**

(U) The enemy then continued south, threatening to isolate Kontum City. But air power pursued him relentlessly. FACs guided F-4s and other fast movers into the Tan Canh area to destroy the abandoned war materiel. F-4s became tank killers, using Laser Guided Bombs (LGBs), and often guided on target by Spectre gunships. B-52s struck at forward enemy elements and their logistic support.^{44/} All this gave the enemy a severe pounding, slowing his blitzkrieg and gaining valuable time for ARVN's 23d Division to set up defenses.

(U) Although losses slowed the enemy, they did not stop him. He pressed on throughout the highlands, and the whole of Binh Dinh

* Confirmed, despite the chaotic battlefield conditions, by Hq 7AF (Liebchen, Kontum, p 21).

** This situation was repeated several times, and not only in Military Region II. One Senior Fighter Duty Officer commented:
 . . . the first two weeks of this offensive we used at least 80% of our TACAIR destroying our own stuff which ARVN left when they broke and ran. (Liebchen, Kontum: Battle for the Central Highlands (S), p 25.)

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Province appeared in danger of falling. On the positive side, South Korean and ARVN troops, aided by heavy US tactical air and B-52 strikes, cleared him from Bong Son and An Khe Passes on 26-27 April, reopening Highways 1 and 19. On 26 April, US tactical air destroyed a vital bridge on QL 14* near Bien Dien. Efforts to reopen the Chu Pao pass south of Kontum (known as the "Rockpile") remained inconclusive however, despite massive B-52 and tactical air strikes supporting these ARVN (45th Regiment) operations.^{45/} An index of the B-52 support provided is the fact that over half of the 1608 B-52 strikes within South Vietnam in April attacked enemy artillery positions and troop concentrations around Kontum City.^{46/} As the month ended, however, the overall situation appeared to be deteriorating, with officials believing the city could not last 24 hours if attacked soon.^{47/} One small ray of hope came on the last day, 30 April, with a report that on that date a B-52 strike had apparently frustrated enemy plans to attack Fire Support Base (FSB) Lima, 15 miles northwest of Kontum City. Some 50 of the attackers were reported killed by air and as many more in a dazed condition were subsequently engaged by gunships.^{48/}

Problems in Providing Air Support

(U) During this first month of the enemy offensive, numerous problems arose in the US effort to provide adequate air support for the

*Quoc Lo National Highway.

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South Vietnamese forces. With US withdrawals and the progress of Vietnamization, the tactical air control structure used by US forces had been virtually eliminated and this function assumed by the VNAF in three of the four Military regions. With the reinitiation of large scale US tactical air operations in the area, the USAF liaison officers who had been retained in each military region to advise the VNAF and coordinate between US and allied forces on air operations (Tactical Air Support Division), now took on control of all US tactical air and FAC activity. The divisions were augmented with TDY personnel and more USAF FACs were added. The Seventh Air Force Tactical Air Control Center allocated assets to each of the divisions which in turn assigned sorties in the region.

(U) VNAF assets continued under VNAF direction however, and despite close liaison with USAF forces, some confusion arose.^{49/} Command and control presented many difficulties due of course to the generally hectic conditions and the wholly new situation confronting the allies. It especially became a problem during the retreat of friendly units, when the US intelligence system was often virtually "blind," radio intercept stations being overrun, sensor readout facilities lost, and cables and antennas cut by the incoming enemy artillery. During the first weeks of the Quang Tri offensive a serious problem also was reported in Military Region I, when VNAF FACs assigned to provide close air support for ARVN in the front line of battle failed to do so. They did their flying only well inside friendly lines and left USAF FACs with responsibility for

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complete visual reconnaissance and close air support.^{50/} By contrast, the VNAF A-1 tactical air units performed very well, contacting ground commanders when necessary, working without VNAF FACs, and getting outstanding results, often providing strikes when weather prevented other fighters from doing so.^{51/}

(U) With the fall of the forward bases and with weather precluding observation aircraft from verifying the ground situation, the formulation of suitable targets for the B-52s, for tactical air Skyspot strikes and artillery fire support became a critical problem. The number of Skyspot and LORAN requests submitted by RVNAF units was "astronomical"--reportedly based more on estimates than on valid intelligence.^{52/} To provide more accurate B-52 target planning, the 3d ARVN Division developed a target box plan covering the entire area from Dong Ha south to Quang Tri and west to a line between Cam Lo and the Ba Long valley. Over 200 boxes, enabling ground commanders to request strikes by target number, were designated. Most of these strikes were extremely effective due to NVA force concentrations and to the B-52's capability for last minute target changes. For example, on 9 April, a B-52 strike near Dong Ha, as reported by the province chief, destroyed 3 artillery pieces and 27 tanks.^{53/} Despite the targeting problems, overall results were more than favorable. As on US Marine adviser put it:

The only minor problem was that it seemed the Air Force always wanted everything in fifteen minutes, or less. We would get a call from DaNang, telling us they wanted our B-52 requests in fifteen minutes, or where were the Skyspot requests? Needless to say, it was done. We would have given them anything to continue the great support we were getting.^{54/}

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(U) Another problem was getting military clearances to strike immediate targets. Some requests, probably because of communication snafus, were simply never forwarded through ARVN channels and the targets received no strikes. A special difficulty arose over the "no-fire" zones set up--sometimes over a wide radius--to facilitate search and rescue efforts. In more than one case such zones permitted the enemy to move large concentrations of artillery, tanks, and infantry through an area, with friendly troops unable to return fire or request tactical air support.^{55/}

(U) Complicating air support effectiveness was the fact that ARVN often failed to take the initiative in following up to exploit the massive "softening up" that air and naval gunfire had provided. Similarly, they did not make enough effort to pin down the enemy in ground action so as to enhance effectiveness of air strikes against him.^{56/} At other times it was difficult to get the ARVN artillery to stop firing in order to permit air strikes, and when the resumption of artillery fire was authorized, another air strike was often due.^{57/} Other hazards included the way ARVN frequently failed to fire illumination rounds at the altitude requested, firing them too high and leaving the FACs brilliantly exposed to enemy AAA fire. A particularly demoralizing problem was ARVN's refusal to fire mortars for fear of revealing their positions--they seemed to want complete destruction of the enemy by air! As one US Marine field adviser said, "I have found that the Vietnamese do not have a

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firm grasp of concepts of close air support and fire support coordination. They want all the air they can get, but they do not understand the types of ordnance available nor how to employ it."^{58/}

Air Innovations

(U) Some of the first month's many problems in trying to coordinate air support with South Vietnamese activities on the ground would be ironed out with time and more experience. In the meantime, the situation was critical and US forces had to try to make their efforts count as much as possible. First, as already noted (see p.37), air sorties were immediately diverted from Laos and Cambodia into the higher priority areas in South Vietnam. Then, effective 15 April, the USAF established turnaround capability for up to fifteen F-4s at Bien Hoa AB, enabling Thailand-based fighter-bombers to make a strike in South Vietnam, land at Bien Hoa to rearm and refuel, and then fly another strike on the return trip to the Thai bases. This change also decreased tanker requirements.^{59/} Another innovation was teaming up a USAF forward air controller and a marine naval gunfire spotter from the Air and Naval Gunfire Liaison Company

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(ANGLICO) operating from DaNang, to get more efficient use of tactical air, artillery, and naval gunfire resources.^{60/}

(U) Probably the most important innovation was the use of B-52s for close air support on a much larger scale than ever before. Thus, the percentage of SEA B-52 strikes within South Vietnam rose from 44 percent in March to 90 percent in April.^{61/} The big bombers were extremely effective against enemy forces in all three major battle areas, in some cases making strikes within 1000 feet of South Vietnamese forces. The altitude at which they flew allowed them to operate in the face of enemy AAA when it was not safe for other aircraft to do so. SAC's KC-135 aerial tankers also took on a new and highly effective role. The stepped up air war would not have been possible without them, for the KC-135 refueling enabled the fighters (with limited range due to their heavy bomb loads) to extend their striking range--over North Vietnam, for example.^{62/}

(U) In another innovation, the gunships, whose primary mission had been interdiction (especially truck killing), now assumed a greatly expanded role in close air support of troops in contact. Sometimes they were the only air support available and ground units called on them increasingly as a result. Often the enemy broke contact at their appearance on the scene. Spectre gunship crews were given crude, hand-drawn maps of the city under attack with instructions from the ground, as one pilot recalled, to "go north along main street for three blocks, turn east there, and hit the second house from the corner." Spectre's ability to destroy buildings within 10-20 meters of friendly troops was especially advantageous.

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Gunships were also used at times for flak suppression during attempted cargo airdrops, or as forward air controllers, and they were a prime source of reconnaissance information. They were of course very vulnerable to enemy AAA in daylight operations and had to avoid known SAM areas.^{63/}

TABLE 3 -- USAF FIXED WING GUNSHIP SORTIES, 1972

		JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
SOUTH VIETNAM	AC130	1	2	2	267	278	210	143	97	135	141	136	131
	AC119	4	13	24	159	225	130	212	227	157	119	149	79
LAOS	AC130	439	381	403	55	60	16	29	11	12	17	91	143
	AC119	262	208	256	102	47	36	34	44	62	62	12	0
KHMER REPUBLIC	AC130	0	10	2	33	49	74	76	115	51	59	60	23
	AC119	0	0	0	0	21	77	43	10	1	0	1	0
TOTAL BY TYPE	AC130	263	393	407	355	387	300	300	223	198	217	287	297
	AC119	439	221	280	261	293	243	289	281	220	181	162	79
TOTAL		702	614	687	616	680	543	589	504	418	398	449	376

Source: PACAF

Air Operations Against North Vietnam

(U) As noted, most air activity in April went to help hard-pressed South Vietnamese ground forces. But air strikes against the North also increased dramatically. On 1 April both General Abrams and Admiral McCain recommended tactical air strikes against the North below 18° north latitude. The next day, the JCS directed tactical air strikes and naval gunfire against supply concentrations in the North up to 25 miles north of the DMZ. On 4 April, they extended

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this authority to 18°, and on 8 April to 19°, north latitude.^{64/} Admiral Moorer warned Hanoi that the attacks would inch northward unless the offensive in the South stopped.^{65/}

(U) From the start, the White House had been considering greater use of the B-52s to pressure North Vietnam to halt its attack. On 8 April when the President heard of Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker's and General Abrams' warning cable to Presidential adviser Henry A. Kissinger that the offensive could last for "several months," and that air and naval action was needed to head off a communist victory, he ordered the B-52s into action.^{66/} The next day 12 of them (supported by numerous supporting aircraft from Task Force 77 and the Seventh Air Force) successfully attacked a railroad yard and POL storage plant in the Vinh area^{67/} --marking the first time since 25 October 1968 that B-52s had struck North Vietnam. On 12 April, with similar support, eighteen B-52s bombed the Bai Thuong airfield, making it unserviceable and destroying one MIG-17.^{68/}

(U) During this time the President's top advisers urgently debated using B-52s against Hanoi and Haiphong. Secretary Laird was unenthusiastic, fearing Congressional opposition to it might jeopardize financial support of the war.* Secretary of State Rogers feared it

*Secretary Laird proved to be right. Two days after the B-52 raids on Haiphong, on 17 April, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted 9 to 1 in favor of cutting off all funds for use of US ground, naval and air forces in Vietnam after December 31, 1972.

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might jeopardize the Moscow summit. Admiral Moorer favored it because he thought the B-52 strikes could cripple the offensive in the South. Presidential adviser Kissinger agreed with this view but he reportedly wanted to use the B-52s mainly to "signal" Moscow that the United States was determined to stop the enemy offensive, summit meeting or no summit meeting.^{69/}

(U) President Nixon, after considerable deliberation, decided in favor of the attack, and on 15 April an intensive 1-day strike, called Freedom Porch Bravo, took place against military and logistic targets in the Haiphong area. US Navy and USAF tactical air and seventeen B-52s--plus a large support package of chaff, ECM, and Wild Weasel/Iron Hand SAM killers--struck POL storage plants, warehouses, shipyards, and the Cat Bi and Kien An airfields.^{70/} In directing this attack, the Administration not only wanted to destroy some of North Vietnam's oil depots. Even more perhaps, it was hoping the strikes would compel Hanoi to call off the offensive. As a Kissinger aide explained: "We consider it a tactical decision . . . partly political, partly military. We are trying to compress the amount of time the North Vietnamese have to decide whether the offensive is worth continuing and whether they have the means to continue it."^{71/}

(S) Photos confirmed that the strikes inflicted extensive damage to rail lines and POL supplies--a later Air Force report was to claim destruction of half the known POL storage in the Hanoi/Haiphong area.^{72/} Some 65 SAMs were fired at the attacking US forces, 34 or

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35 of them at B-52s.^{73/} Three MIG-21s were shot down, but one F-105G and one A-7 were also lost.^{74/} The enemy offensive went on however, and on 21 April and again on the 23d a force of eighteen B-52s struck warehouses and transshipment points farther south in the Thanh Hoa area.^{75/} But the 15 April attack on Haiphong was to be the only B-52 attack in the Hanoi/Haiphong area until Linebacker II operations in December.*

(U) Summarizing US air operations during April, a total of 1,974 US attack sorties (USAF, USN, and USMC) were flown north of the DMZ during the month, including 82 B-52 sorties. Elsewhere, there were 1608 B-52 sorties in South Vietnam, 68 in Laos, and 48 in Cambodia. USAF tactical air sorties rose to 5439 in South Vietnam in April and decreased to 565 in Laos and 406 in Cambodia.^{76/} Sixteen US aircraft were lost during April to ground fire or SAMs, and 770 SAMs, a record number, were fired at US aircraft. Ten enemy MIGs were destroyed during the month, four by USAF or Navy F-4s and six by US air strikes on enemy airfields.^{77/}

*Apparently opinion was not unanimous on B-52 bombing accuracy. After the first B-52 attack on Vinh (9 April) Admiral McCain, CINCPAC, raised some questions with General Holloway, CINCSAC, about the accuracy of future SAC strikes. (CINCPAC msg to CINCSAC (TS), 13/0300Z Apr 72.) General Holloway replied on 20 April that more and better recent information had superseded the earlier tenuous and inconclusive data on the Vinh strike, and said he felt the B-52s were "even more effective here than they are striking fleeting targets in the south." He attributed the more effective later results at Bai Thuong and Haiphong to a switch in bombing techniques from the MSQ method to a radar synchronous one. (SAC Hist FY 72 (TS), Vol III, p 455.)

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(U) Throughout April, the first month of the offensive, enemy accomplishments took on the semblance of a blitzkrieg. In the first days, the weather greatly abetted Hanoi's moves because of air's inability to respond with full effectiveness. The demoralization of numerous South Vietnamese troop units, both in terms of their physical retreat and the equipment they lost, aided the enemy even more. But the relentless application of allied air assets in every area succeeded in slowing down the incipient rout, enabling ARVN forces to gain the time and morale to regroup and hold the line (with continuing air support) against further losses.

Withdrawals and Negotiations Continue

(U) In spite of the massive problems and anxieties in the field, the Administration in Washington continued with its two other objectives: withdrawal and negotiations. The largest US incremental drawdown thus far was entering its final month when the enemy offensive began. On 26 April, just after the third enemy front had opened, the President announced another MACV 20,000 space reduction to a level of 49,000 effective on 1 July.

(U) As for negotiations, the President had been actively trying, just prior to the Easter offensive, to get Hanoi to resume secret talks. When the Administration realized the scope of the invasion it could scarcely avoid a touch of panic, contemplating the possibility of a South Vietnam in shambles in May when the President was due to arrive in Moscow for an important summit meeting. Fearing the collapse of the Saigon regime, it felt compelled to intervene

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massively on its behalf, but at the same time feared such action might cause the Russians to call off the meeting. At this moment, advantage of a Moscow invitation (initiated by Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin) for Henry Kissinger to make a secret visit to Moscow* (19-24 April) to discuss SALT and other matters for the upcoming summit meeting. This might be a way to ease tensions with the Russians over the enemy offensive (they were, after all, supplying all those tanks to Hanoi), and get them to do something to restrain the North Vietnamese. If the President could propose a reasonable compromise on SALT [as Kissinger had just done in secret talks with Dobrynin in mid-April], despite the North Vietnamese invasion, then perhaps Soviet leader Leonid I. Brezhnev could produce one on Vietnam.^{78/}

(U) In his discussions with Brezhnev about Vietnam, Kissinger's suggestions that Moscow reduce arms deliveries to Hanoi and discourage the latter's use of force against South Vietnam at first met only with indifference. But throughout, he also kept stressing that the United States could not accept a military defeat in South Vietnam and "would take whatever steps were necessary" to prevent it--with all this implied concerning a possible US/Soviet confrontation. Moreover, he pointed out, a North Vietnamese victory would affect the whole climate of US opinion towards trade and detente. This was something Brezhnev could understand and respond to. Kissinger

*In an unusual "first," Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin flew in one of the Presidential jets with Kissinger to Moscow.

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also gave Brezhnev an advance look at the latest cease-fire proposal the President was going to present to Hanoi. If offered to let Hanoi keep some of its troops in the South--the 100,000 or so who had been there before the invasion--if Hanoi would agree to let Thieu remain as President of South Vietnam.^{79/} Brezhnev appeared to think this proposal had possibilities, implying that the North Vietnamese were too stubborn and rigid. He told Kissinger that Le Duc Tho would be returning soon to Paris, and while he could guarantee nothing, urged Kissinger to renew the secret talks.

(U) Shortly after Kissinger's return from Moscow, Hanoi indicated readiness to meet in Paris on 2 May. The meeting took place but with no result. The President's new offer was very simple and Kissinger had felt for this reason that Hanoi would accept it. If the North Vietnamese would agree to a cease-fire and a return of American POWs--that and nothing more--the United States would withdraw from Indochina within four months* Le Duc Tho disdainfully rejected the offer. Apparently feeling completely assured by its recent military successes (Quang Tri had just fallen), North Vietnam would not compromise. It was pushing for American agreement to a coalition government that would exclude Thieu. Kissinger described this as "the imposition, under the thinnest veneer, of a Communist government," and called it totally unacceptable.^{80/}

*According to his biographers, Kissinger believed North Vietnam would understand what he could imply but never state--that the Communist offensive had driven Nixon to streamline his policy down to bare-bones requirements: the prisoners and a decent interval of time for withdrawal: that, in effect, Nixon wanted to get out of Vietnam so badly that all he was asking of Hanoi was an exit visa . . . if possible, by election day. (M & B Kalb, Kissinger, p 299)

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IV MAY AND JUNE: THE U.S. DECIDES TO GO ALL OUT AGAINST NORTH VIETNAM

(U) Already in mid-April the Administration had begun to realize it would have to move decisively against North Vietnam if it wanted to stop the offensive and save the Saigon government from collapse. But the desire to do so had been tempered by concern for what effect such action might have on the planned "summit meeting" in Moscow in May and on hopes for further peace negotiations. Dr. Kissinger's April consultations in Moscow had allayed some of these fears, but not, as May began, matters on the South Vietnamese battle fronts which were worse than ever. Quang Tri fell on 1 May and the catastrophic disintegration of the defending ARVN forces--plus the failure of Kissinger's May meeting with Le Duc Tho--put the seal on the Administration's conviction that it had to act.

The Policy Decision

(U) After Kissinger's return from the Paris meeting with Le Duc Tho, the moves for US countering action accelerated immediately. Plans which had been in preparation now materialized into a full-fledged interdiction program to cut off all supplies coming into North Vietnam by mining its harbors, and bombing the railroads coming into the country. This, of course, was to supplement intensified allied action against the enemy within South Vietnam. In preliminary discussions, Secretary of Defense Laird reportedly opposed the plan, and the Director of the CIA, Richard M. Helms,

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didn't think it would be effective since Hanoi could easily get supplies overland from China. Throughout, Vice President Spiro T. Agnew and Treasury Secretary John B. Connally strongly urged the President to take action.^{1/} Dr. Kissinger argued for heavier B-52 bombing in preference to mining the harbors.^{2/} On 8 May, President Nixon met with the full National Security Council to discuss a decision, or rather as some analysts said, to inform them of his decision.^{3/}

(U) Two hours after the meeting the President sent out the orders to launch the operations, and that same evening announced his action to the nation on television, saying it was necessary in order to deny Hanoi the weapons and supplies it needed to continue its aggression.^{4/} Just before making this speech, he explained his action to House and Senate leaders: "We have to do something to affect the situation, based on denying the weapons of war to those who would use them for aggression This action is directed not at the destruction of the North, but at the cutting off of supplies. This is the cleanest, best, most direct way of ending the war."^{5/} That the President was also thinking of his action in terms of the Moscow summit seems clear from various statements he made later:

The country was faced with the specter of defeat, and I had to make a choice, a choice of accepting defeat and going to Moscow hat in hand, or of acting to prevent it. I acted. (Remarks to the National League of Families of POWs and MIAs, Statler Hilton Hotel, 16 Oct 1972.)

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Strength means nothing, unless there is a will to use it If, for example, when I went to Moscow, late in May, at that time we had had Soviet tanks run by the North Vietnamese rumbling through the streets of Hue, and Saigon being shelled, we would not have been able to deal with the Soviets on the basis of equal respect. We wouldn't have been worth talking to . . . in a sense, and they would have known it. (from a conversation at a Congressional reception, quoted in Safire, Before the Fall, p 431)

The Means: Force Augmentations

(U) The major means for implementing US retaliatory moves against the enemy was still further augmentation of US air power, for use both in the north and the south. There was no question of reintroducing land forces. The disappointing performance of the South Vietnamese forces, especially in the fall of Quang Tri province on 1 May, brought home to US planners how greatly US air power would have to be depended on to influence the military situation. Thus, while on 26 April, Secretary Laird had enjoined the JCS to weigh carefully the benefit of further augmentations versus the costs thereof,^{6/} on 3 May, he was asking them for a plan for retaining the augmentation forces and assuring that sortie levels and naval gunfire support "can continue without constraints."^{7/}

The 49th TFW Goes from Holloman to Takhli

(U) The mid-May deployment of the 49th Tactical Fighter Wing (TFW) from Holloman AFB to Southeast Asia (under consideration since early April) was a major USAF augmentation move. It began arriving on the

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10th of May and flew its first combat missions on the 11th. The Takhli base was being reopened after having been turned over to the Royal Thai Air Force on 31 March 1971. The 49th deployed 3034 personnel from Holloman; PACAF sent 742 augmentees; SAC dispatched 369; and 271 others came from other locations--making a total of 4416 personnel at Takhli by 19 May.^{8/} The SAC personnel were for the sixteen KC-135s the JCS had directed to Takhli in early May to provide refueling support for the 49th.^{9/} General Clay, CINCPACAF, asked for twenty more KC-135s to support a higher sortie rate over North Vietnam, and on 18 May, CINCSAC alerted the 301st Aerial Refueling Wing at Lockbourne AFB, Ohio, to ready thirteen more KC-135s and 23 aircrews for deployment to Don Muang in Thailand. Thai political considerations however--including objections from the US Ambassador over introducing combat forces at this civilian terminal--delayed the move until June.^{10/}

B-52 Augmentations

~~Seven~~ Seven more B-52Gs and nine crews were directed to Guam on 21 May when the North Vietnamese were gravely threatening South Vietnamese forces around An Loc.^{11/} Even before they arrived, Admiral Moorer told Admiral McCain the President had directed the JCS to consider deploying another 100 B-52s to Southeast Asia.^{12/}

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Admiral McCain's recommendation was to deploy up to 66 additional B-52s to Guam, including the 8* already enroute.^{13/} The JCS authorized deployment of an additional 58 on 23 May. This was the sixth, largest, and last of the B-52 augmentations sent in response to the enemy offensive. With the departure of this force, SIOP alert became a thing of the past in the CONUS B-52G units; ninety-eight B-52Gs and 144 crews had been withdrawn from the CONUS in less than 2 months.^{14/}

(S) The sending of all these B-52s to Southeast Asia, although ordered by "highest authorities," was not without controversy--above and beyond the basic one over denuding the United States of much of the SAC SIOP force. Ever since mid-May, the new CINCSAC, Gen. John C. Meyer, had been urging use of B-52s against Hanoi and Haiphong. He considered it important to keep pressuring North Vietnam itself without respite and saw the B-52s as a bad weather alternative to tactical air for doing this.^{15/} General Abrams opposed this, not wanting the B-52s diverted from the battle in the south where he felt they were the only thing keeping South Vietnam in the war.^{16/} After the final B-52 augmentation, General Meyer again broached the subject, saying there were now sufficient B-52s for bombing in both the South and the North.^{17/} General Abrams still felt that all currently

*The extra B-52, which made the total of eight, was a leaflet-configured B-52G which had been dispatched at JCS request on 19 May (SAC Hist FY 72, JCS (TS), p 95.)

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programmed B-52 support was needed in the South. He pointed out that the recently deployed B-52Gs could not carry as many bombs as the D models, that the B-52s depended on very extensive tactical air support (approximately 75 tactical aircraft for each mission), and that if bad weather kept tactical air from flying, the B-52s couldn't fly either, despite their all-weather capability.^{18/}

~~(S)~~ Secretary Laird appeared to question whether the last B-52s should have been deployed at all. On the day after JCS ordered their deployment, he asked Admiral Moorer and the chiefs (as a "separate and distinct part" of an assessment he was requesting) to "address the recently authorized additional deployment of 58 B-52Gs." He asked for their judgment of the incremental value of the deployment, "especially relative to incremental costs," by 31 May.^{19/}

~~(S)~~ At first, Admiral Moorer asked Secretary Laird to cancel this request--noting the pressure of other work and the fact that such a report involved considerable duplication of an earlier one.^{20/} But he was apparently unsuccessful, for on 31 May the JCS replied as requested. They said the additional B-52s would "contribute significantly towards achieving a balance between Linebacker efforts, close air support, and interdiction in Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam." There would now be enough sorties for both North and South Vietnam without lessening the previous strike effort in South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. The uninterrupted strikes in the North were desirable to keep the enemy off balance by saturating his defenses, complicating his resupply and communications, and demoralizing the military and civilian populace.^{21/}

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Apparently not satisfied with this response, Secretary Laird on 6 June asked the JCS for another evaluation of the military requirement for retaining 206 B-52 aircraft in Southeast Asia, indicating that "his reading of the 31 May JCS reply did not reveal a firm plan for effective use of the 58 B-52Gs in the late May augmentation."^{22/} The JCS responded on 19 June, repeating the arguments previously advanced, and reporting that these B-52s had been fully utilized in helping meet enemy threats to Hue, the Kontum and Pleiku areas, as well as to the northern part of MR III and elsewhere. They noted that prior to the latest augmentation, General Abrams had said less than two-thirds of valid B-52 targets could be struck with the assets then available.

There was also an urgent need to use the B-52s to attack the enemy logistics system in North Vietnam and RP I*--MACV had been planning to do this beginning 27 May, but the tactical situation around Kontum and Hue had caused a delay. With the additional available sorties, these operations were now possible--they had in fact begun on 8 June (see p. 92). The JCS concluded firmly that the augmented B-52 force was "needed for essential support of ground operations, simultaneous execution of the counter-logistics offensive, and the capability for a greater weight of effort in the attacks against the war-making capability of North Vietnam while maintaining the required level of effort in South Vietnam. These requirements will continue till it is apparent that the threat has been neutralized."^{23/}

*Route Package I. One of the several numbered areas into which North Vietnam was divided by US military authorities in order to facilitate command and control of air operations.

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Air Augmentations of Other Services

(U) As part of the buildup for carrying the attack to the north, the US Navy on 4 May added a sixth carrier to its task force in the Tonkin Gulf and a seventh on 24 May. These enabled the Navy to keep four carriers on station at all times, providing an average strike sortie rate of about 250 a day.^{24/} On 16 May the President directed two Marine A-4 squadrons from the 1st Marine Air Wing at Iwakuni, Japan, deployed to Bien Hoa specifically to provide in-country support to the RVNAF. Their arrival released F-4 aircraft based in northern RVN and Thailand for the interdiction campaign against the North.^{25/}

(U) By the latter part of May, the US had added almost 500 aircraft to its combat air fleet in Southeast Asia, permitting the very large increase in the sortie rate over both North and South Vietnam. In May, the peak month, the average daily attack sorties rate in South Vietnam--for all three US services--was about 400, almost one-third of them by the Navy and Marines.^{26/}

Efforts to Tighten Command and Control

(U) An indication of the seriousness with which the retaliation plans were undertaken may be seen in the fact that the JCS were directed "by higher authority," (believed to be the President) on 6 May to provide comments on a proposal to establish a Supreme Command in Southeast Asia. The rejected it, saying they considered the existing MACV organization the best available to support US efforts--its setup involved no penalty in communications timeliness

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between Southeast Asia and the National Command Authority. Establishment of a Supreme Command would be counterproductive because of the extra efforts and difficulties it would entail, especially at the present time.^{27/}

(U) Perhaps to bolster their case, the JCS in replying to the President referred to a planned reorganization within MACV (under consideration for some months) whereby certain staff elements of the Seventh Air Force and Headquarters MACV would be combined, with the Commander, 7AF, becoming Deputy COMUSMACV.^{28/} One week later, on 15 May, this planned reorganization became a reality, when "to accommodate command and control of the expanded air war"--Headquarters MACV and Headquarters Seventh Air Force were merged and collocated, and the Seventh Air Force commander became Deputy Commander, MACV.^{29/} Representation at this level, long sought by the Air Force in recognition of its role, thus finally came.

RVNAF Augmentations

(U) Part of the US retaliation consisted, naturally, of measures to strengthen South Vietnamese forces as well as US air forces. On 24 April the JCS advised Secretary Laird that current South Vietnamese losses could be replaced within a few months and no short-term large-scale accelerations would be necessary.^{30/} But a week later, right after the fall of Quang Tri, Secretary Laird was asking the JCS to

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address "in depth" added assistance to the RVNAF,^{31/} and on the 3d he announced that a special Defense Department team under Assistant Secretary Barry J. Shillito, would go to South Vietnam to review equipment needs.^{32/} On 4 May, M-48 tanks began arriving in South Vietnam aboard C-5A transports to replace those lost in the Quang Tri fighting.^{33/}

Project Enhance

(U) The President in the meantime asked for an examination of "measures for strengthening RVNAF capabilities by augmenting their equipment,"^{34/} measures which eventually became known as Project Enhance. Deputy Secretary of Defense Kenneth Rush, replying to this, was blunt with the President, saying that while augmentation was desirable it was not a sufficient step in bolstering the RVNAF's capabilities. That depended more on South Vietnam's will and desire than on equipment. "We must be careful," he said, "not to delude GVN and RVNAF that hardware can in some way substitute for backbone." After listing "constraining factors" on introducing new weapon systems, he enumerated options for providing equipment to meet various criteria, such as: to contribute to immediate capabilities--i.e., judged necessary for current fighting to strengthen the RVNAF posture in case a cease-fire or legislative action (i.e., Congressional cut-off of funding) precluded sending additional equipment; to provide

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equipment--"high impact" items--demonstrating US support of government of South Vietnam.

(U) Among items suggested for the latter option were: 1 Air Cavalry Troop for each of the Military Regions (including 144 Cobras, 160 LOHs, and 128 UH-1Hs); 4 Hawk Air Defense Battalions; 56 A-4B aircraft; and 3 squadrons of F-4s. The Secretary opposed this option because it would result in a significant degradation in US assault helicopter and F-4 capabilities, a minor reduction of US air defense capability, and would cost an additional \$400 million plus large support costs. Further, some items would require 2 years of training and logistics development before the South Vietnamese could effectively use them. Handling the F-4s, for example, was "grossly beyond current VNAF maintenance capabilities." Rush felt the President's desired impression of firm US support could be made equally well by announcing shipment of certain items and publicizing the major resupply effort then under way to replace materiel lost in the current fighting. Most items decided on could be delivered in 3 months, but the physical effort of shipping items already scheduled or in transit would tax available air and sea transport, including commercial augmentation. Even so, US ability to deliver materiel would exceed South Vietnam's ability to receive, secure, and forward it--this was the resupply effort's pacing factor.^{35/}

(U) The JCS and the field commanders agreed with Deputy Secretary Rush in recommending against the "high impact" items such as F-4s. But they approved the other two options he suggested, together with their related equipment, for immediate implementation.^{36/} The following aircraft items were among those approved:^{37/}

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32 additional UH-1 assault helicopters
30 STOL aircraft
5 additional F-5As
48 additional A-37s
14 RC-47s
23 AC-119Ks
23 EC-47s
12 C-119Gs for maritime patrol
28 C-7s

Operations Against the North

(U) The Administration's plans to stop the enemy offensive at its source became a reality on 8 May with President Nixon's announcement of the bombing and mining campaign against North Vietnam. Some US military leaders had been urging this action--unsuccessfully--since the early years of the war.* They had maintained it did little good, to harass the enemy as he moved supplies into South Vietnam as long as he had an open-ended source of new supplies available from outside via North Vietnamese ports and China. Contingency plans for operations to counter this situation had existed for years, and now the JCS renewed work on them.^{38/}

Mining the Harbors

(U) The first part of President Nixon's 8 May order opening the all-out campaign against the North directed the interdiction of the enemy's supplies by sea. North Vietnam was heavily dependent for sophisticated war equipment, such as its all-important air defense system, upon the USSR and the People's Republic of China (PRC). And

*The objection to such action had always been fear of bringing Russia and China into the war. Nixon's new diplomatic approaches to both powers had to a considerable extent neutralized this threat.

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to get this, it depended largely on sea-lane lines of communications-- some 85 percent of its war materiel came through the port of Haiphong. Since previous US policy had always opposed attacking Haiphong for fear of endangering neutral shipping, the President's decision to mine all North Vietnam's harbors was a radical departure and, from all indications, a surprise to the enemy.^{39/}

(U) As President Nixon was informing the country of his decision, US Navy aircraft from the carrier Coral Sea were already mining Haiphong harbor and its approaches, using delayed action fuzes set to arm 72 hours after sowing. The President announced that neutral shipping had 72 hours to leave Haiphong before the mines became activated.^{40/} The next day the approaches to the other North Vietnamese harbors and some of the inland waterway networks were sown with MK-36 destructor bombs.*

(U) The mining of his harbors confronted the enemy with enormous logistics problems. General Vogt, 7AF commander, asked about the effectiveness of the mining, said:

I would say almost a hundred percent.** They were reduced to offloading . . . from Chinese vessels . . . which didn't have too much tonnage aboard to begin with They could do it only at night; they had to do it when there was no Navy air around harassing them; they had to run through mine fields with their lighters because we had a lot of MK-36s dropped in there. It took in excess of a month to unload a five or six thousand ton vessel. So, only a dribble was coming through that area.^{41/}

*Airdropped magnetic influence and anti-disturbance fuze mines.

**According to Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, in his book On Watch (p. 415), the CIA disagreed with this estimate. In a meeting with the President in early December, they said no less than a third as much materiel as before had been arriving since 8 May.

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From the time of the mining through September 10, no ships--Communist or other third-country shipping--were known to have attempted leaving or entering the mined harbors.^{42/} According to MACV reporting there was evidence that at least 110,000 tons of shipping turned back rather than face the minefields. With the sealanes severed, North Vietnam was forced to turn to rail, inland water, and highway networks to move needed materials, greatly heightening the impact of the simultaneous air attacks being directed against it.^{43/}

Linebacker

~~(S)~~ Linebacker was the name given to the program of air attacks implementing the second half of the President's decision: to stop supplies entering North Vietnam by land, i.e., from China. Like the mining order, it went into effect on 8 May. The JCS order specified a "continuing USAF and USN tactical air and NGFS* interdiction effort, augmented by B-52 sorties as required, to destroy and disrupt enemy POL and transportation resources and LOC in North Vietnam."^{44/} It was actually an expansion of the intensified air operations against the North developed during April, called Freedom Train (see p.67-70), with the significant difference that Linebacker was permitted to operate throughout North Vietnam. Even targets within the 10-mile restricted zones around Hanoi and Haiphong and in the Chinese buffer zone were authorized. Every precaution was to be made to avoid

*Naval gunfire support. When the offensive broke, all naval gunfire ships in the vicinity were dispatched to the area on an emergency basis. Naval gunfire rounds in MR I increased from 3,000 in March to well over 80,000 in June. (USMACV Command Hist, 1972-73 (TS), Vol II, p. L-27.)

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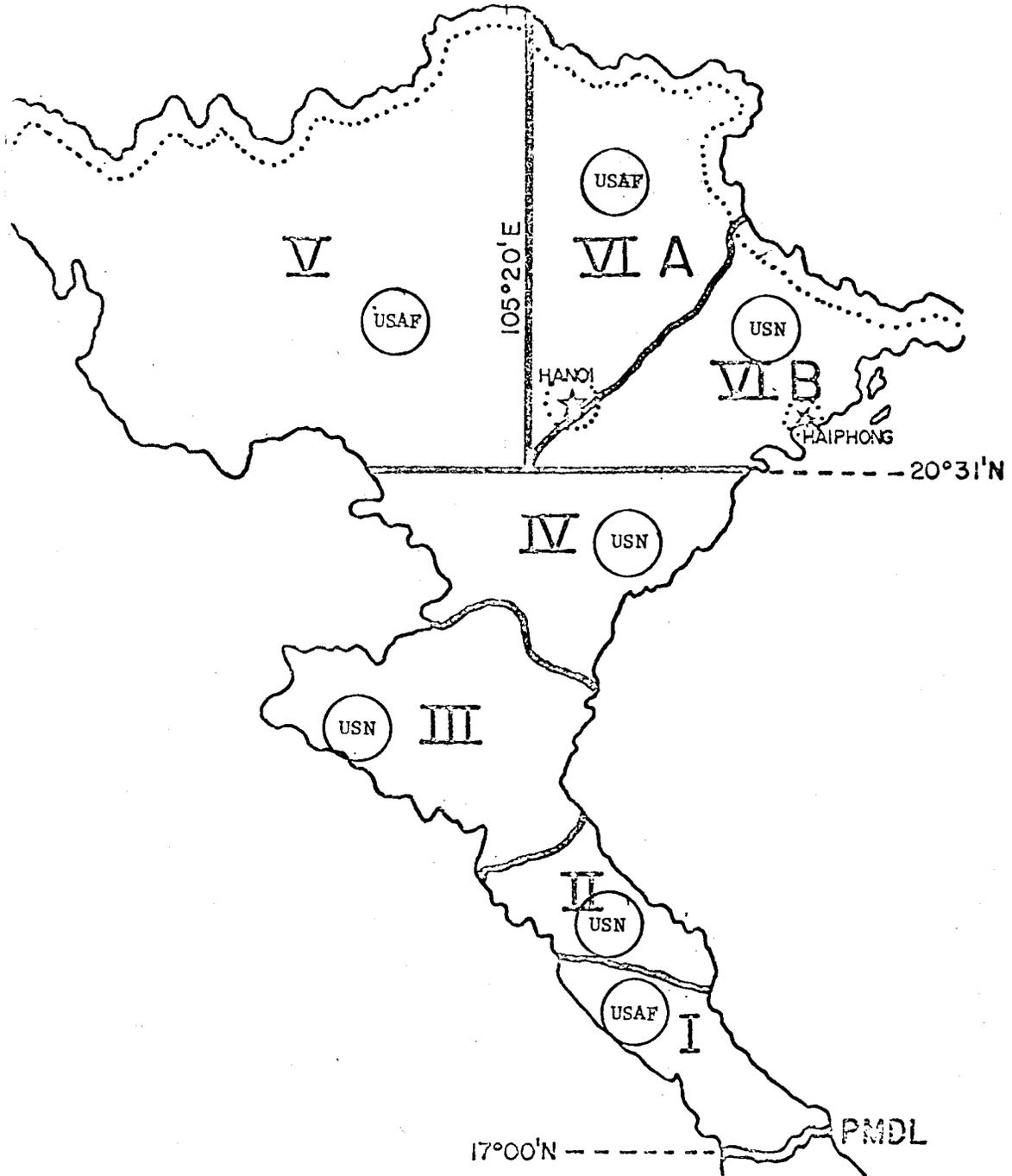
civilian targets, but specific strikes could be, and were, validated against power plants, POL storage areas, railroad lines, and warehouses, no matter where they were. In one case even the Hanoi main railway station was targeted, although there was a switch at the last minute to a higher priority target.^{45/}

(U) While the Linebacker campaign was directed against the entire enemy transportation and supply distribution system, "highest priority was to be given to hitting the roads and rail lines from China, since, with the closing of the port at Haiphong, these would be North Vietnam's "most viable method of resupply."^{46/} Or as President Nixon told General Vogt: "I want those rail lines interdicted from China because I'm going to close the ports, and I don't want that tonnage to come down the railroad."^{47/}

Interdicting the Railroads from China

(U) For purposes of command and control in the Linebacker operation, North Vietnam was divided into Route Packages (RP) and responsibilities assigned as follows: Route Packages I, V, and VI-A to the US Air Force; Route Packages II, III, IV, and VI-B to the US Navy (see Map 8). With its additional carriers, the US Navy could now provide some 250 sorties a day. The carriers' proximity to Navy's assigned route packs gave their aircraft a very substantial time over targets,

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OPERATIONAL AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY, NORTH VIETNAM

Source: MACDI

MAP 8

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and throughout Linebacker I, these planes furnished well over half of both attack and support sorties over North Vietnam.

(U) The Air Force had responsibility for interdicting the two rail lines leading from China which lay in RP V and RP VI. It found that, given the accuracy of the new laser-guided bombs, the most effective way to interdict the rail lines was by destroying the railway bridges. The first strike, on 10 May, was against the Paul Doumer bridge and the Yen Vien railroad yard. A total of 88 aircraft (Iron Hand, chaff dispensers, escort, combat air patrol, weather reconnaissance, barrier combat air patrol, search and rescue) supported the 32 strike aircraft over the target. Twenty-two MK-84 LGBs and seven MK-84 electro-optically guided bombs caused heavy damage to the bridge. One hundred and eighty-four MK-82 unguided bombs were dropped on the Yen Vien railroad yard, cutting tracks and damaging boxcars and warehouses. The Iron Hand force expended nineteen AGM-45s and six AGM-78s against SAM strikes. The entire force encountered heavy concentrations of AAA over the target area, including 42 reported SAM firings. They also were challenged by nine MIG-19s and seven MIG-21s, three of which were downed. Losses were two F-4s downed by MIG-19 cannon fire. ^{48/}

(U) Two days later, on 12 May, four other railroad and two highway bridges were either destroyed or severely damaged. On the 13th, the Than Hoa bridge, a famous bridge halfway down the North Vietnamese panhandle which had withstood 3 years of severe pounding by Air Force and Navy planes--which, it was said, "would never go down"--was destroyed. In contrast with the many previous efforts--including five lost aircraft--the Linebacker 1-day effort, consisting of three flights of F-4s carrying LGBs and one flight armed with conventional

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500-pound bombs, struck the bridge and left it unusable.^{49/} Another important target, was the Lang Giai railroad bridge, on the Northeast rail line, which required special authorization from the JCS since it was well within the PRC buffer zone, about 20 miles from the PRC. On 25 May, despite a hampering cloud cover, twenty F-4s, using LGBs and EOGBs,* took out 6 of its 11 spans.^{50/} By destroying these bridges, the USAF in a short time interdicted both the Northeast and Northwest rail lines, cutting to a trickle the amount of supplies coming from Communist China. As General Vogt expressed it, ". . . we had 15 bridges out on each railroad at any given time--as fast as they would build them, we would knock them out again."^{51/}

(U) With the railroads from mainland China interdicted and the harbors closed, North Vietnam and their Chinese allies switched to roads to try to get supplies into North Vietnam. The road network and truck transport targets had not been neglected in the interdiction effort, but now they began to get more attention. Because of the enemy's bypass routes and shuttle tactics, it was difficult to stop all truck traffic on the road, and General Vogt preferred to emphasize strikes against truck concentrations such as the one just south of the Chinese border, and motor vehicle storage and repair facilities in the Hanoi area.^{52/}

Internal Supply Targets

(U) Targets other than the crucial transport arteries were not overlooked. From the beginning, the Seventh Air Force directed strikes

*Electro-optically Guided Bomb

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against SAM sites, truck parks, military storage areas, port facilities, and POL storage points. For example, air operations reports for 10 May recorded 12 secondary explosions, 14 secondary fires, 5 trucks, 2 military warehouses and several POL tanks destroyed. That same day, USAF and USN F-4s shot down 11 MIGs.^{53/} On 18 May, USAF fighter-bombers hit a large POL storage area 3½ miles northeast of Hanoi with LGBs and destroyed more than 5½ million gallons of fuel.^{54/} On 20 May, US fighters--again using LGBs--knocked out the Hanoi electric transformer station 8 miles northwest of the capital, and on 26 May destroyed a large warehouse and storage area at Son Tay about 50 miles northwest of Hanoi.^{55/} In the first week of June, F-4s heavily damaged the Bac Giang electric power plant, and pilots from the carrier Kitty Hawk struck the Haiphong petroleum storage plant, destroying three huge storage tanks. On 9 June tactical air fighter-bombers struck fuel depots, storage areas, troop locations, and other military complexes all the way from the DMZ to Haiphong. The following day pilots reported direct hits on transformers, turbines and generators in North Vietnam's largest hydroelectric power plant at Lang Chi--without hitting the off-limits dam connected with it.^{56/}

(U) The B-52s did not take part in operations against the North in May, but beginning on the 8th, they made 260 sorties during June. Up to this time, General Abrams had been reluctant to divert B-52s from their dramatically successful role in staving off enemy efforts in the South. Now, with the additional sixty-six B-52s arriving

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in the field at the beginning on 8 June, B-52s struck enemy LOCs and installations supporting the offensive in RP I in the southern logistics part of North Vietnam.^{57/} As General Vogt described it:

We had very effective anti-logistics campaigns up in the Route Packs with the B-52s . . . we found pre-fab buildings which the enemy had constructed all over the area, and in which he was putting his forward stocks We put large numbers of B-52 strikes in there and the impact was dramatic Believe me, [the enemy] was really hurting.^{58/}

What Made Linebacker Effective

(U) General Vogt enumerated three factors that particularly contributed to the success of the Linebacker campaign against the North. One of the most important was the use of laser-guided bombs (LGBs). Because of their accuracy, the LGBs could be used in sensitive areas (such as in the PRC buffer zone) where ordinary bombs would be likely to incur undesired collateral damage. They afforded high survivability in high threat areas because the strike force did not need to linger or return again and again and also could drop from a high altitude.^{59/} Above all because of their great precision these bombs could inflict maximum damage with relatively little effort. As General Vogt described this feature:

One day we went up and knocked out five bridges on the Northwest Rail Line with a laser strike, and when PACAF ran that through the computers, they determined that where we used 24 total bombs, it would have taken 2,400 bombs to do that by the old conventional method.^{60/}

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(U) A second factor of importance--to which General Vogt himself contributed--was a concentrated 7AF effort to refine the LORAN all-weather bombing system. While the weather was still good, he ordered one flight out of each mission to bomb, using the LORAN system. That flight used 1000 pound bombs and delayed fuzes, so that photo interpreters could pick them out from the others (which used 500 pounders), and score the results of each. According to General Vogt. "there was nothing like actually dropping the bombs after putting the correction factor in, seeing where they fell, and then correcting it We went through 48 different targets that way." In this way, greater precision than ever before was achieved in LORAN bombing--a consistent 200 meter accuracy, according to General Vogt.^{61/}

(U) The third factor in Linebacker effectiveness was that President Nixon permitted field commanders to select--from a list validated in Washington--which targets to hit and when. General Vogt's comments exemplify the appreciation felt by field commanders:

. . . The advantages were apparent. It permitted us to play the enemy defenses. If we banged away here for a while, and they shifted over there with their SAMs and their anti-aircraft, then we hit them over there. And we watched the weather--when it was stinking over the northeast rail line, then we hit them over the northwest.

We were not constrained. In some of the sensitive areas, for example, I was allowed to take out all power in a very short time, with the exception of one power plant . . . in Hanoi itself The cumulative impact was crushing Many parts of Hanoi had none at all. This in turn impacted on the repair shops and the engine rebuild facilities all around the city This was something we were never able to do in Rolling Thunder because back in the McNamara days we were supposed to hit this power plant during this particular week, and then we wouldn't get another power plant for maybe six weeks. By the time we'd get one over here, they had rebuilt this one.^{62/}

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(U) Summing up the effects of both the mining and bombing operations, General Vogt reckoned, as a "safe" figure, that they had reduced the enemy to getting through about 20 percent of the supplies he had been receiving prior to the operations. The bombing had gotten into his forward supply depots, and he was beginning to hurt at the battle fronts for many items: he was short on POL, short of food, ammunition and all basic essentials.^{63/} Admiral McCain, CINCPAC, in a July 1972 interview, said Linebacker had been very effective, but he felt that the true impact might be only now being felt by the North Vietnamese army as their stockpiles and caches in the south were depleted and communications lines disrupted. As time went on, he felt, the overall effectiveness of Linebacker would be even more apparent.^{64/} To summarize, the Administration, faced with collapse of the Saigon government at the beginning of May, took tough, decisive action to stop the invasion and save the country. The decisions to mine North Vietnam's harbors and bomb the railroads from China were steps which had long been recommended by the military and now, finally taken, were a bold departure from the hesitant, graduated response reactions of previous administrations. They represented a gamble with US public opinion, which had been increasingly hostile to the war, and also with the outcome of the imminent summit meeting with Moscow on which the Administration had hinged an important part of its policy. But the gamble paid off. President Nixon, in a 29 June news conference, reminded reporters of the news headings about "the spectre of defeat in Vietnam" just a week before the mining and the bombing of the North began. To date, he said the

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effect of the mining and bombing had been to completely turn the situation in Vietnam around.

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V THE SITUATION ON OTHER FRONTS IN MAY AND JUNE

(U) While the US action against the North sought to cut off all incoming resupply and damage and intimidate Hanoi, efforts against the offensive in the South had to be pursued with equal intensity. The operations against the North were spectacular and a new departure, but they would be of little avail if the enemy continued to forge ahead in the South. As May began, the danger that South Vietnam would succumb to the enemy ground offensive was very great.

The Situation on the Military Fronts in the South: Quang Tri

(U) By 1 May all ARVN resistance at Quang Tri had disappeared except for Ranger and 20th Armored Brigade elements outside the Citadel and 132 US and ARVN personnel trapped inside. By noon, the ARVN regional commander, Gen. Vu Vann Giai, considered the situation hopeless and ordered a retreat to the south. Almost immediately the entire ARVN command and control structure disintegrated. All plans for an orderly retreat, including emergency evacuation of the men in the Citadel, fell through, as for 2 days South Vietnamese forces fled south through a gauntlet of enemy artillery and rifle fire. The intense, coordinated attacks coming from all directions created havoc by splitting some RVNAF forces and inducing panic in others. The Stars and Stripes published poignant reports by some of the retreating soldiers:

. . . Men wept to see the battered remnants of once proud units--the elite Rangers, South Vietnamese Marines, tankers, and the mauled 3d Infantry Division.

"We were beaten at Fuller, we were beaten at Dong Ha and we have been beaten at Quang Tri," said one Vietnamese soldier. "I am finished. I have had

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enough." Another said, "It was hell in Quang Tri. The shells were landing all around us. We started running to get away. It was horrible. We were so scared. We just ran and ran . . . we didn't see any Communist soldiers. It was just the shells."^{1/}

But not all the forces broke and ran, as one observer noted:

The RVN Marines never lost fighting effectiveness and had to be ordered to withdraw many times to plug the gaps in the front. In the end, the VNMC 147th and 258th Brigades, and the 20th Tank Squadron, because they never stopped fighting and remained effective, enabled the US advisors in the Citadel to evacuate. Those units (VNMC and 20th Tank) with their advisors fought their way out towards Hue.^{2/}

(U) As the ARVN artillery increasingly lost all effectiveness, US tactical air and naval gunfire provided vital defense protection. USAF FACs were constantly aloft, maintaining communications contact, providing reconnaissance for the retreating columns, and directing tactical air strikes against pursuing North Vietnamese forces. There were some daring air rescue operations, including the extraction of the personnel marooned in the citadel, by four "Jolly Green" helicopters during the height of the enemy attack on the city.* Eventually all RVNAF elements retreated from Quang Tri Province, the last of them, the Marine 369th Brigade, reaching the south side of the Thac Ma River on 3 May.^{3/}

(U) With Quang Tri Province in their hands, the North Vietnamese forces turned toward the city of Hue. A new general, Lt. Gen. Ngo

*Major Brookbank, Air Liaison Officer (ALO) with the 3d ARVN Division, who coordinated rescue efforts from within the citadel, said: ". . . each FAC was given four sets of TACAIR to commence air support at 1539 with the 'Jolly Greens' due in at 1535 Four squads had been formed in case the evacuation failed and a breakout had to be made. The air cover commenced at 1530 as F-4s delivered every type of ordnance. The tactical situation dictated that normal safe distances be waived. So, we could do nothing but watch, wait, and thank God for the US Air Force." (Brookbank Rpt, p 18.)

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Quang Truong, had replaced the defeated Gen. Vu Van Giai and immediately began to reorganize the defenses around this city. One of his first moves was to request the Seventh Air Force to move Military Region I's Direct Air Support Center (DASC) from DaNang to Hue. General Vogt, despite complex support problems, agreed to the "superhuman efforts" required and made the shift.^{4/} A Fire Support Coordination Center for US naval gunfire support teams and ARVN artillery was collocated at the DASC and the two coordination centers worked together with excellent results.^{5/} General Truong's priorities for fire support were: the enemy's 130-mm guns, tanks, lesser artillery pieces, and trucks. Seventh Air Force undertook a concentrated effort to destroy the 130-mm guns, and to choke off the enemy resupply effort. In the first week of May, it began a most intensive air interdiction campaign, cutting roads, bombing bridges (using guided bombs) and destroying hundreds of trucks. Any sign of enemy movement brought air strikes. At the same time, tactical air and B-52 strikes continually inflicted heavy casualties on troop concentrations and tanks moving toward Hue, time and again frustrating the enemy's planned ground attacks.^{6/} According to Admiral Moorer, North Vietnamese troops had been poised for a major attack on Hue in early May, but had been forced to abandon it because they had been so badly punished by the bombing and the mining, and had overextended their lines of supply.^{7/}

(U) This pause in the attack on Hue appeared to be crucial in giving the South Vietnamese time to regroup their forces. In the second week of May, regiments of the 1st ARVN Division and other elements launched a major search operation west of Hue. Preceded by B-52

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attacks and supported by air and artillery, they succeeded in forcing the NVA 29th Regiment out of combat because of heavy casualties suffered. Concurrently, the South Vietnamese Marine Corps undertook a series of limited-objective operations in the southern part of the province.^{8/} On 20 May, the enemy made a major armored thrust against their positions, but the Marines received strong air support and held their defense line, with tactical air reportedly destroying 300 enemy personnel and 18 tanks. On 25 May the enemy launched another strong "human wave" attack and again the Marines held. The massed enemy troops suffered heavy casualties from US and VNAF tactical air and ARVN and naval artillery, and by 29 May retreated across the river.^{9/}

(U) During June the enemy strove to regain the upper hand and carry the battle toward Hue. But whenever he massed for an attack, B-52s, tactical air, and artillery fire saturated the area^{10/} while on the ground, the Marines kept the pressure on. In a 2-day operation on 8-9 June and another on 18 June, the Marines pushed north back into Quang Tri province 13 miles, killing over 350 of the enemy and capturing numerous weapons, including five of the new SA-7 missiles.^{11/} Once more, on 21 June, the enemy launched a major 3-day attack south and east of FSB Nancy, but again suffered severe losses (including 259 killed and 123 wounded) at the hands of the Marines supported by US and VNAF tactical air and ARVN artillery.^{12/} Then on 28 June, ARVN's MR I headquarters launched a counter-offensive to the north. B-52s and naval gunfire pounded the advance area and waves of tactical

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air flew overhead in close air support. The ARVN forces advanced across the My Chanh River, forcing the enemy on to the defensive. Meanwhile the Marines pushed up from the south to flank the northern counter-offensive. This signalled the end of the battle for Hue and the beginning of the new battle to retake Quang Tri Province. ^{13/}

An Loc

(U) The beginning of May found the siege of An Loc stubbornly continuing, with South Vietnamese relief forces making little or no progress towards the city, and the resupply task still seemingly hopeless in the face of increasingly accurate enemy fire. Seven drops scheduled for the night of 2/3 May were cancelled after the first one fell 700 meters from the drop zone, and a C-130 was lost the same day. At MACV's request, Army and Air Force paradrop trouble-shooting experts flew to Vietnam and the Army sent 76 packers from the 549th Quartermasters Aerial Resupply Company in Okinawa. ^{14/} In addition, a high velocity system was adopted, which proved most accurate, and kept supplies from falling into enemy hands. Resupply effectiveness improved immediately as the result of these measures and so did the hitherto hopeless outlook of the ARVN defenders. ^{15/}

(U) Meanwhile the literally thousands of tactical air, gunship, and B-52 sorties flown against the besieging enemy since early April had been steadily disrupting his supplies, decimating his troops, and lowering general combat capability. In an effort to overcome

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the city before resupply and reinforcement made it too strong to be taken, the North Vietnamese poured in more shells and on 11 May launched a combined tank and infantry attack. But ARVN defenders held their ground, and by noon destroyed seven enemy tanks. Cobra gunships destroyed four more and FACs directed all available ordnance against the attack--in one case ordering Daisy Cutters* dropped 200 meters in front of South Vietnamese positions threatened by some 500 enemy troops.^{16/} Though very successful, 11 May was also very costly: one A-37, one Cobra, and two FAC O-2s fell to AAA fire by late afternoon. B-52 support was not hampered by the AAA fire however, and General Hollingsworth could report that coordination of B-52 strikes and tactical air "allowed us to punish the enemy severely." In one case a B-52 strike virtually annihilated an attacking enemy force.^{17/} Or, as the MACV history chronology for 11 May laconically noted, "NVA troops and tanks entered the provincial capital of An Loc and were met by 70 B-52s dropping 1,700 tons of bombs in the war's heaviest bombing concentration."^{18/}

(U) The next night heavy enemy attacks, spearheaded by tanks, began in very bad flying weather. As a result, the key factor in blunting the attack consisted of six B-52 strikes--after which direct fire from the tanks stopped and did not resume for the rest of the night.^{19/} When the weather improved slightly after midnight, a Spectre gunship engaged troop concentrations and equipment--despite incoming artillery rounds at the rate of one every five seconds. No ground attack materialized. General Hollingsworth cited Spectre's "magnificent

*Bombs with fuze extenders, designed to explode at the surface to kill personnel and to defoliate. (S)

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performance" in the bad weather, but felt, in the final analysis, that the B-52 strikes had "spoiled another apparent enemy effort to seize An Loc."^{20/}

(U) Just at this time several sightings of the Soviet SA-7 Strela missile in the vicinity spelled new trouble for low-level air operations--enemy AAA fire having already restricted the Cobras, FACs, and low-level napalm strikes by A-37s. On 14 May, a USAF O-2 was shot down by an SA-7, in the second confirmed hit of this type on a USAF aircraft. From then on, slow-moving FAC aircraft could not fly below 7,000 feet nor C-130 resupply missions below 10,000 feet. These new restrictions caused immediate, material changes in tactical air support for the An Loc defenders--the AC-119 Stinger gunship was ineffective at such altitudes, and the FACs now had to fly so high they had to use binoculars.^{21/}

~~At~~ At mid-month the pattern of the An Loc action appeared to shift however. The daily shelling continued at between 2000 and 3000 rounds, but enemy ground attacks decreased, and then, according to a CIA report of 18 May, tactical air could no longer find any targets in the immediate vicinity of An Loc.^{22/} On the same day, General Hollingsworth reported that apparently the decimated enemy units had withdrawn "from the immediate vicinity of An Loc as a result of the heavy losses inflicted by TACAIR and B-52 strikes."^{23/} But stubborn enemy persistence in holding up the South Vietnamese relief column, plus unfavorable air weather, prolonged the siege and it was not until 12 June that the last of the VC/NVA were driven from An Loc and 1650 fresh troops brought in 2 days later by US helicopters.^{24/} On 23 June, the relief column (ARVN 46th Regiment)

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finally arrived. According to General Hollingsworth, the B-52 strikes were decisive in getting it through^{25/}--NVN forces trying to stop it were caught in the open by two B-52 strikes 15 minutes apart, and "simply dissolved." On 26 June General Hollingsworth reported that the campaign was over.^{26/}

(U) As General Abrams said: "There is no question that the B-52s have been a major factor [at An Loc], and in preventing the enemy's accomplishment of most of his major goals."^{27/} Enemy officers captured during this period told how the constant allied bombardment, coupled with other hardships, had caused major breakdowns in morale and fighting spirit to the extent that some troops were "no longer responding to orders from superiors." Another POW report indicated that the NVA 7th Division had received 360 replacements in May, but none during the first 18 days in June and "morale was low due to fear of B-52 strikes, sickness, and poor leadership."^{28/}

(U) The B-52s' response to the ground commander's needs received the highest praise from Army officers involved.^{29/} The 3d Ranger Group, for example, reported that the B-52 strikes not only destroyed enemy troop formations, but when employed close to the city virtually eliminated mortar and AAA until the VC/NVA were able to move up replacements.^{30/} Army commanders also increasingly valued the B-52s because they could be diverted to a higher priority target if required, the use of the Ground Target Change (GTC)--made a minimum of 3 hours prior to launch--having become extremely effective.* General Hollingsworth's deputy, Brig-Gen. John R. McGiffert, II, gave

*By the end of May almost 90 percent of B-52 missions at An Loc were GTC.

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credit for this to the tremendous cooperation shown by the SAC ADVON personnel in making the missions responsive and flexible.^{31/} But the other extreme, some FACs and aircraft controllers did not receive the warnings on the B-52 strikes because of weak radio transmissions or because they didn't have their proper equipment turned on.^{32/}

Kontum

(U) On 1 May John Paul Vann* told the Seventh Air Force that B-52 and tactical air strikes at the end of April had stalled the enemy attack on Fire Support Base (FSB) Lima and that ARVN could hold Kontum.^{33/} At 6 o'clock that evening however, ARVN forces abandoned FSB Lima together with numerous trucks, tanks, artillery pieces and other equipment intact, which tactical air was then called on to destroy. Two days later on 3 May, 2000 friendly troops abandoned Landing Zone (LZ) English on the east coast, again leaving all equipment behind and tactical air again having to destroy it. Between 5 and 11 May, the enemy intensified attacks on strong points surrounding Kontum City, especially Polei Klang and Ben Het. The former fell on the 9th, but the latter held, aided particularly by tactical air and Spectre gunships.^{34/}

(U) The situation in Kontum City itself was deteriorating and on the eve of the 14th of May a senior US adviser reported from there:

We had refugees by the tens of thousands. . . we kept on losing one FSB after another and the NVA kept on applying the pressure. However, from the time Tan Canh fell on 24 April to the battle at Kontum on the 14th we estimate that we killed

* Senior US Adviser to MR II, an almost legendary figure in the war in SVN, killed on 9 June when his helicopter crashed near Kontum.

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about 40% of the NVA force--and it was predominantly with airpower. That tactic would be to hit the enemy as he was massing to attack the FSBs. From the assembly areas to the attack positions we would hit them, not only with tactical air but with Arc Lights.* We were really using the Arc Lights as close-in protective fire; and as the enemy moved south they were used 1000 meters in front of the front lines as protective fire. We were having tremendous results with this firepower, but they kept on coming. The big question was, would the ARVN fight the tanks?^{35/}

(U) The answer came on 14 May when the ARVN 23d Division engaged some 11 tanks and a battalion of infantry attacking Kontum. They were joined by gunships and US and VNAF tactical air and the impetus of the attack quickly faded.^{36/} Vann reported many indications that the enemy had planned a major assault on Kontum City, but that "his timetable has been disrupted by preemptive bombardments."^{37/} Intelligence sources confirmed the B-52 role in thwarting the attack, having observed at least 200 enemy bodies and 100 individual weapons on 15 May in an area hit by the B-52s the day before.

(U) The long-expected attack on Kontum City began, nonetheless, on 25 May. With the aid of US gunships and VNAF tactical air,^{38/} the first thrust was repulsed, but persistent heavy rocket and artillery fire forced closure of the airfield runway. The senior US Army adviser, Brig. Gen. John G. Hill, Jr., declared a tactical emergency and requested additional air support to replace ARVN artillery neutralized by the enemy shelling. In spite of US and VNAF tactical air attacks during the day and B-52 strikes and gunship sorties at night, the enemy attacked again shortly after midnight, and breached the ARVN defense line early in the morning. The next day he was still

*Code name for B-52 sorties

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within the city but too weak to expand his perimeter further.^{39/} ARVN forces began to counterattack and securing the southwestern part of the runway, established a helicopter refueling point and C-130 drop areas. For the next 3 days most of the 203 US tactical air sorties in Military Region II were in support of Kontum City, and B-52 strikes and gunship flights kept the attackers constantly disoriented.^{40/} By the 29th, MR II's senior USAF representative reported that "although much of Kontum remains occupied, Mr. Vann is greatly encouraged by the lack of enemy activity in and around the town. He told Lt. Gen. N. Van Toan "We may have turned this situation around. If so, it's only because of the absolutely tremendous Arc Light and TACAIR support we've received in the past two nights."^{41/}

(U) By June 1st, the enemy has ceased direct heavy pressure on Kontum City and an expected attack on 6 June, for which maximum air support was readied, failed to materialize.* On 9 June six C-130s delivered cargo to Kontum^{42/} and a few days later a FAC in the area noted that "all the traffic we've seen since 10 June has been moving west. All the trucks we find are going into Laos; all the troops are going west into Laos."^{43/} By 29 June a 30-vehicle military convoy reopened Route 14 from Pleiku to Kontum^{44/} and combat activity dropped to a low level throughout the province.

(U) Even more so than at An Loc, the role of air at Kontum appears to have been decisive. Tactical air (always conceding the problems in using fast moving aircraft for close air support) saved many fire support bases from being overrun, destroyed war materiel abandoned

*On 7 June, in a minor but not unmeaningful footnote to history, a small ceremony was held in II Corps G-2, where toasts were drunk to USAF and SAC to mark the 1000th B-52 strike in MR II since 1 January 1972. (Liebchen, Kontum (S), pp 64-68.)

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by ARVN or massed by the enemy, and provided a shield for friendly forces when flying interdiction against enemy troops or logistics.^{45/} Gunships often provided the only available air during crucial contacts and were a mainstay throughout because of their versatility. Of the C-130 crews, many of their pilots said they "had the most guts in Southeast Asia." Totally dependent on other aircraft or ground forces for protection, they made some 95 air drops and 284 landings, mostly at Kontum and Pleiku, through every type of enemy fire to deliver the materiel needed to carry on the fight.^{46/}

(U) The South Vietnamese Air Force also did an outstanding job, flying side by side with US air, to resupply the city and the fire support bases during some of the heaviest fighting. In spite of its subordinate position under the ARVN, its elite pilot force suffered no lack of fighting spirit and leadership. At one point in their participation in the Kontum action, Vann reportedly came in, very excited, and said of them, "That's the best damn bombing I've seen in my years over here!"^{47/}

(U) The role of the B-52s is perhaps best seen from statements by some of those most directly involved in the action. As one US Army adviser put it: "It's a known fact that the greatest thing the enemy fears is the B-52s . . . they never know when those B-52 bombs are going to come raining down on them . . . I'm convinced it was the B-52 that saved Kontum the way they were employed."^{48/} A senior US Army adviser to the ARVN 23d Division in Kontum City said:

Once penetrations were made and they pulled the plug on B-52 strikes, we employed them much in the same manner as our close defensive artillery. As a matter of fact . . . they do the job much better than artillery. It was extremely important because . . . we

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had lost our ammo dump and our resupply had been cut down to nothing With the application of the B-52 strikes I feel they really saved the day, because after them the NVA was never able to come in again and significantly reinforce or resupply the lodgments they had made in the city In essence, airpower--tactical air and the B-52s--served as a shield which allowed us to pull enough infantry strength off the perimeter line to come back into the interior of the position and eliminate the lodgments that had been made.^{49/}

A USAF FAC recalled: "There's no doubt in my mind that if it weren't for the B-52s and other air that Kontum would have fallen. The ARVN would sit in their bunkers and call for more and more air, closer and closer. I found out later that's what helped destroy the 3 regiments which got into the city."^{50/} Brig Gen Ly Touy Ba, the Commander of the ARVN 23d Division had his own views as to the proper use of B-52s in such cases:

I must say that the air gave us . . . support like I have never seen before If the B-52s strike only strategic targets they can strike only Hanoi. From the 17th parallel I say that the best strategic targets for the B-52s is right in front of my positions. That means from 5 klicks to 2 klicks (kilometers), because that's where the VC regroup before they attack the positions. I think that's a strategic target where the VC group for an assault. We must use the B-52 in close support to the front lines.^{51/}

Probably the best summation of the air role in the defense of Kontum City came from Col. Joseph Pizzi, USA, Chief of Staff, Hq SRAG, Pleiku City:

As one looks back, one could say there were many ifs on the battlefield. For example, one could make the case that if it had not been for John Paul Vann the battle could have been lost. One could make the case that if it had not been for the presence of Gen Hill over Kontum on the 26th of May that the battle could have been lost. If

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it not been for the TOWs* at a critical point in time, the battle could have been lost. Many of these "ifs" are possible. However, one "if" is a certainty--that if it had not been for US air-power the battle would have been lost.52/

Summary of Air Role

(U) At the end of June, fighting had not stopped completely on all three fronts, but most of the steam had gone out of the threatened blitzkrieg. This defeat, this frustration of all the enemy's objectives, the fact that he wasn't able to pull off what he had hoped--as General Vogt said--this was the main achievement. "The thing that stopped them was the most thorough air interdiction program of the war," he said, adding:

The weather was absolutely clear during the period 1-31 May. We saw the enemy attempting to move large convoys of trucks, towed weapons, ammunition carriers, and armored personnel carriers down the route packages of Highway 1 in broad daylight in the face of air superiority We had, for the first time, good targets presented for air in-country. Instead of trying to find guerrillas dispersed in hamlets and spread around the countryside, we were now getting mechanized units in mass and in great strength . . . [North Vietnam] started that campaign in the south with over 750 T-54 tanks, and we've destroyed over 650 of them--virtually wiped out the bulk of their tank force.53/

(U) There could be no getting around the fact that on all the major fronts of South Vietnam, air power had played the major role in bringing about the defeat of the once almost overpowering enemy offensive. Certainly the ARVN ground forces fought hard, and in

*Tube-launched, optically-tracked, wire-guided missile.

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TABLE 4 -- B-52 (ARC LIGHT) SORTIES IN SOUTH VIETNAM

B-52	1972												1973
	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN
MR 1	89	319	325	554	825	1503	1962	1669	1559	926	913	747	775
MR 2	151	162	364	691	991	503	274	164	218	160	249	221	307
MR 3	0	0	0	363	363	161	108	162	195	688	504	249	415
MR 4	0	0	0	0	44	40	229	312	182	140	101	64	155
SOUTH VIETNAM	240	481	689	1608	2223	2207	2573	2307	2154	1914	1767	1281	1652

Source: PACAF SEASIA Air Summary

TABLE 5 -- TOTAL SORTIES (ALL AIR ASSETS) IN SOUTH VIETNAM

	1972												1973
	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN
USAF (TACAIR)	13,285	10,954	8,228	14,998	18,078	13,468	12,164	11,031	7,446	6,573	7,625	5,122	3,380
VNAF	73,336	65,706	75,794	73,193	69,469	67,593	61,152	69,519	57,361	67,472	72,977	69,080	60,180
USN	12	690	128	5,470	3,784	2,642	2,223	2,201	1,739	2,170	2,775	2,323	3,911
USMC	0	0	0	681	1,486	1,967	2,036	1,920	1,408	1,795	2,333	1,754	1,028
USA	184,356	132,930	114,242	94,264	106,686	88,186	80,609	70,504	63,298	64,119	50,379	39,029	38,242
RAAF	358	78	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	271,347	210,358	198,392	188,606	199,503	173,856	158,184	155,175	131,252	142,129	136,089	117,308	106,741

Source: PACAF SEASIA Air Summary

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some instances spectacularly. But, as General Abrams' successor, Gen. Fred C. Weyand, said in his overall appraisal of the campaign, "it appeared unlikely that the South Vietnamese forces could have stopped the invasion without the tremendous effectiveness of air-power . . . [He could not] see how anybody in any service could question the decisive role played by the fixed-wing gunships, tactical air, and the B-52s."^{54/}

The Situation As To Redeployment and Negotiations

(U) Despite the hard fighting on three battle fronts and the accelerated air buildup, the Administration still held to its withdrawal aims. It went ahead with previous plans for reducing US forces in South Vietnam to 49,000 by 1 July, and on 28 June the President announced an additional 10,000 cut by 1 September. Since everyone agreed that US air support was critical to South Vietnamese survival and had to continue undiminished, these reductions did not significantly affect the USAF. A few units, like the 390 TFS--minus personnel and equipment which went to Thailand with the 366th TFW (see below)--deployed to the CONUS. But most air units redeploying from South Vietnam at this time simply transferred to Thailand. No longer in South Vietnam, they were still very much in the war. Their departure meant their bases in South Vietnam had also to be phased out. So on 15 May the USAF turned Cam Ranh Bay Air Base over to South Vietnam, and ongoing plans to phase out DaNang Air Base by 1 July went forward.*

*In addition to conforming to US withdrawal plans, the latter move became highly expedient in the wake of the enemy offensive, which had threatened to engulf all of Military Region I. This threat, and the dwindling protective US ground forces, made for a greatly deteriorating security situation in and around DaNang.

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(U) Already in January, General Ryan, CSAF, had recommended USAF's FY 73 tactical air sorties be handled out of Thai bases because of the Administration's withdrawal aims.^{55/} This policy remained in effect even with the many subsequent air augmentations, because the JCS decided early in the new campaign (at the President's behest) not to allow large buildups in South Vietnam.^{56/} But this policy put very heavy pressure on the Thai bases and on Thai manpower ceiling policies. There was a serious lack of additional beddown space and the rapidly increasing US air assets required corresponding increases in support personnel. Thus, the JCS spent much time trying to find a suitable base for the 49th TFW before deciding to reopen* the base at Takhli in early May. Similarly, although the 366th Tactical Fighter Wing (TFW) had to leave DaNang by the end of June, it was almost the end of May before the decision was made to move it to Takhli.^{57/}

~~(S)~~ For the newly formed 15th Forward Marine Air Group (MAG) (1035 personnel plus planes and 4000 support personnel) which also had to leave DaNang, the JCS in late May decided to open the base at Nam Phong.**^{58/} The rapidly growing SAC forces also encountered beddown problems, especially the KC-135 tankers. The deployment of tactical

*The USAF had closed out operations at Takhli in 1971 and turned the base over to the Thai government on 31 March 1971.

**This American-built bare-base in northeastern Thailand had never been officially opened although there was a highly classified training program housed there. (Nicholson, The USAF Response to the Spring Offensive, p 48.)

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air units from DaNang to Thailand meant more tankers were needed because of the greater flying distance from Thailand to MR I and North Vietnam. To help accommodate the tankers, another Thai base, Don Muang,* was pressed into service. In mid-May^{59/} General Clay proposed that thirteen of his requested twenty additional KC-135 tankers be bedded down at Don Muang and asked CINCPAC to get the necessary country clearances. But the US Ambassador, Leonard Unger, was cool toward this move--as he had been also to using Nam Phong. He feared there might be "adverse political impact" if combat support aircraft were introduced and made "highly visible" at this Thai civilian terminal--Don Muang being part of Bangkok International Airport. The decision was subsequently made to go ahead with the tanker deployment however, the Thais belatedly granting country clearance one day before the deployment began, on 15 June.^{60/}

(U) USAF redeployment to Thailand during this period thus constantly posed problems for the planners. But physical problems were not the only ones. Ambassador Unger continued to warn constantly about imposing on the Thais too far. One high Thai official stressed that Thailand did not want to be treated as a "waste basket" for units from Vietnam.^{61/} The truth was that, with the shift of the US military power base from South Vietnam--and in the face of the initial successes of the North Vietnamese offensive--many Thais were concerned

*Royal Thai Air Force base, USAF operations there having been cut back to aerial port activity only.

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that a greater US presence there would make them a new focus of enemy attack.

The Negotiating Front

(U) At the beginning of May matters appeared almost dormant on the negotiating front. Dr. Kissinger and Le Duc Tho had met on 2 May in Paris but, as already noted, without result. Both sides were pre-occupied with military operations, the North Vietnamese with their seemingly successful offensive, the United States with plans to stop it. But even in the midst of its retaliation against the north after 8 May, the United States did not give up efforts to continue the negotiating process, still hoping to enlist the aid of the Soviets and of the Chinese. Although most of his advisers assumed that Russia would cancel the summit after the US mining of North Vietnam's harbors and bombing of its cities, President Nixon gambled otherwise, as already noted. (See pp. 75-76.) He endeavored to keep the lines open to Moscow. Thus Kissinger gave a copy of the President's 8 May speech to Ambassador Dobrynin, and in his next day's news conference tried to describe the benefits of cooperating with the Americans so compellingly that the Russians would lift their sights beyond Vietnam to see the larger objectives to be gained thereby.*

*On the 10th, with the situation still very taut, Kissinger undertook a small diplomatic gesture also intended to underline these higher priorities and help hold the summit plans together. He called Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin and invited the Soviet Minister of Foreign Trade, Nikolai S. Patolichev (in Washington at the time to explore trade prospects) to stop by the following morning at the White House for a chat with the President, pointing out how Brezhnev had recently received Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz. Dobrynin seemed to approve, and later that evening called back to confirm the appointment. Next day, 11 May, the diplomats spent almost an hour with the President discussing trade, and "no one raised the issue of Haiphong Harbor or referred to the summit." When Patolichev returned to the Soviet Embassy a reporter asked him if the President's trip to Moscow was "still on," to which Patolichev replied, "We never had any doubts about it. I don't know why you asked this question. Have you any doubts?" (M&B Kalb, Kissinger, pp. 309-10.)

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(U) As matters turned out, the Soviets did not cancel the summit, and important negotiating efforts took place at the 24-30 May meeting in Moscow. At the outset, President Nixon took the stand that if the Soviet's allies were attacking a US ally with Soviet equipment, the United States had no choice but to retaliate. The Soviets denounced the US bombing and mining and urged the President to negotiate on the basis of Hanoi's peace program. President Nixon wanted Brezhnev to persuade North Vietnam to accept the American peace program and take a chance on a favorable political evolution in South Vietnam.^{62/} Dr. Henry Kissinger had parallel discussions with Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko who also urged resumption of negotiations with Hanoi. Kissinger kept stressing that the President was determined to lead the United States out of Indochina--all he required of North Vietnam was a respectable exit.

(U) According to the account of the Kissinger/Gromyko discussions by Tad Szulc,^{63/} the US in Moscow made two shifts from its previous position. In the first, Kissinger, using the bombing as a bargaining chip, said that US air action over North Vietnam did not necessarily have to continue until all POWs were returned--as President Nixon had stated 2 weeks earlier when he announced the mining and bombing of North Vietnam. In the second shift, a major one, Kissinger said the United States was prepared to back a tripartite electoral commission in South Vietnam,* including elements from the Saigon regime, the Viet Cong, and the neutralists. Previously, the United States had opposed this out of fear it could

*Gromyko [according to Szulc] was so taken aback that he said to Kissinger, "let me make quite sure I got right what you said." Kissinger replied: "Yes, I'm talking about a tripartite commission."

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evolve into a coalition government.* In other words, the United States seemed to be making it clear that its private negotiating position was infinitely more flexible than its public posture. And in these changes in its private position--added to the previous concession permitting North Vietnamese troops to remain in the south (see p. 72)--there was already taking shape the basis for a final settlement.

(U) It is impossible, as of this date, to verify Szulc's report of the two new US proposals made at the summit meeting, but President Nixon and Secretary Brezhnev did appear to reach an understanding that it was in the interests of both superpowers to end the war in Vietnam quickly. This understanding only came after considerable subtle bargaining in which the decisive factor was the tight linkage which the US drew between trade with Russia and peace in Vietnam.^{64/} The Soviets seemingly concluded that the advantages of making a deal with Washington on trade, credits, and SALT were important enough for them to lend Nixon a hand in settling the Vietnam war.

(U) On the last day of the summit, 30 May, Nixon and Brezhnev agreed that Soviet President Nikolai V. Podgorny would go to Hanoi as soon as possible to relay the US views expressed in Moscow. Two weeks later, Podgorny was arguing with the North Vietnamese that switching their negotiating tactics with the United States would not be critical

*Szulc goes on to describe how the tripartite commission proposal became the subject of prolonged debate with Saigon during August and September, with Thieu refusing to go along with it despite efforts by Gen. Alexander Haig, Jr., and Ambassador Bunker who had been commissioned to win him over. On 14 September President Nixon then approved Kissinger's request for permission to go ahead unilaterally and tell Le Duc Tho that the US accepted the tripartite commission. This decision was not wholly popular in the White House--Haig, for example, complaining privately to friends that Kissinger was "giving away too much."

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because Nixon seemed serious about withdrawing and no longer demanded a North Vietnamese troop pullout from the south. Later, in Moscow, he promised that the Soviet Union would "do everything possible for a de-escalation of the Vietnam war" and for the success of the talks in Paris that he said would resume shortly.*^{65/}

(U) It is not possible, given present sources, to establish accurate results of this triangular diplomacy on Hanoi. Probably the real pressure came from US military actions, north and south. Such was the view of former US Ambassador to Laos, William H. Sullivan, who said on the "Meet the Press" program of 28 January 1973: "I think they probably had prepared to change their demands sometime earlier in the summer when the full effect of the mining had set in and the degree of supplies which they discovered they could get through China had become calculated and their offensives in the South had been turned back with very heavy losses to themselves." Certainly with the collapse of its offensive, North Vietnam could no longer afford to be as disdainful of peace talks as it had been earlier. Towards the end of June Hanoi recalled all its top diplomats for a special strategy session, and Kissinger hoped this meant that secret talks--leading to negotiations to end the war--would soon begin in Paris.^{66/}

*Right after Podgorny left Hanoi, Dr. Kissinger spent 5 days in Peking where he tried to convince the Chinese leaders too that good relations with Washington were a higher priority than their commitment to Hanoi. He appeared optimistic about results when he returned to Washington, but the Szulc account of this visit portrays Peking as less forthcoming than Moscow. On the other hand, Szulc says the French Foreign Minister, Maurice Schumann, reported to the United States that during his visit to China in early July Chairman Mao had told him of advising the Viet Cong Foreign Minister, Madame Binh, to desist from demanding President Thieu's resignation as a precondition--in certain tactical situations a compromise was advisable. In their new proposal of 11 September, the Viet Cong delegation in Paris followed this suggestion. (Szulc, "How Kissinger Did It," p. 45.)

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In this chapter we have seen how the United States, facing an almost triumphant North Vietnam at the beginning of May, was able in the course of May and June to turn the tide in South Vietnam's favor. The biggest factor in this reversal was the massive, crucial support by US air power to South Vietnamese ground troops. These operations, together with the mining and bombing in the North, insured that the enemy's Easter offensive failed in its aim of overrunning the country. This turnaround in North Vietnam's fortunes, together with some possible prodding from Moscow, led directly to a change in its attitude towards peace negotiations, and ultimately, to the peace agreement. For negotiations resumed in July and were to continue through August and September and culminate in their draft peace proposal in October.

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VI JULY-NOVEMBER: RENEWED EMPHASIS ON WITHDRAWAL AND NEGOTIATIONS

(U) From mid-summer through the fall of 1972, with the enemy fairly well contained, the Administration continued to push its withdrawal and reduction commitments. The JCS and the field commanders, bedeviled by fear that operational efforts might have to be kept up through the rest of the year, continued to oppose hasty action on withdrawal. As soon as the military situation appeared hopeful enough however, the Administration--with an eye on the November Presidential elections of course--pushed ahead with further reductions and a strong new effort for cease-fire negotiations.

The Military Situation

(U) At the beginning of July, the enemy still held most of what he had gained in the first month of his offensive and continued to make his presence felt. But the thrust of his drive had been blunted and during the next 4 months he increasingly confined himself to short, small unit, harassing attacks, including many Viet Cong terrorist incidents.^{1/} The South Vietnamese forces fought to regain the territory that had been lost and, more and more, the period became one of cautious hope.

Military Region I

(U) In Military Region I activity centered on ARVN efforts to retake Quang Tri City. When the counteroffensive began in late June, the South Vietnamese aimed to retake the city in 9 days, but actually it took until 16 September--the longest battle of the war, and very

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costly to both sides. As the MACV historian put it, recapture took so long "because of a determined enemy defense."^{2/} This was indeed true. At first the South Vietnamese Airborne Division tried to take the city and succeeded in breaching one of its walls on 25 July, but withdrew 2 days later. The South Vietnamese Marine Division then attempted an assault on 3 August after 48 hours of preparatory fire, but failed. The battle continued with the Marines taking a tremendous mortar and artillery barrage, reaching a peak of 3000 rounds on 22 August. Due "probably to an increased air effort," as the MACV historian recounted, enemy artillery fire was reduced during the last week of August and the city was successfully retaken on 16 September.^{3/}

(U) A somewhat different version of this battle is given in a CHECO analysis of the action. Citing an interview with General Vogt the study says US air power was not employed during the initial days because the RVNAF wanted to oust the NVA on their own and thus achieve a greater psychological impact. Also, the Seventh Air Force was reluctant to use its forces in the devastation of a South Vietnamese city. However, during the last week of August, the regional commander, General Truong, "after realizing that victory required US air resources," requested and received the tactical air and B-52 strikes that forced the enemy to give up the battered city.^{4/} There was also evidence that Linebacker interdiction operations played a role by helping dry up the enemy's supplies. General Vogt said many POWs in the Quang Tri area reported they hadn't eaten for 3, 4 and sometimes 6 days. Many were down to one clip each for their automatic

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rifles and the issue of sidearms and other weapons often had to consist of getting them from a dead body.^{5/}

Military Regions II and III

(U) On the Central Highlands front, the South Vietnamese on 19 July began a campaign--preceded by B-52, tactical air, and naval gunfire preparations--to retake the northern part of Bin Dinh province. By the 29th they had recaptured all three of the district towns lost during April, and only small sporadic enemy action persisted elsewhere in Military Region II.^{6/} Intelligence sources reported various enemy units pulling back into sanctuary in Laos with heavy losses. Here too it was becoming difficult if not impossible for the enemy to replace his expended supplies, because of Linebacker interdiction operations and the closure of the North Vietnamese ports. For example, a USAF adviser reported that ARVN forces captured an enemy tank intact at Kontum City because it had run out of gas. There began to be speculation that supply problems may have been back of the rather sudden enemy pullback in this area in June--i.e., Hanoi had called off the offensive because it couldn't supply it.^{7/}

(U) Military Region III was largely stable during July and August. The siege of An Loc had been lifted in June, but Route 13 south of the city continued to be fought over and there was sporadic action in the southernmost part of the region. As a whole, however, the situation improved greatly throughout the country during these months. ARVN was regaining confidence and aggressiveness and the

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effects of air power, both on the enemy's supply lines and on his forces' vulnerability, were being increasingly felt. With the improving situation, the VNAF took over more and more of the close air support role and US air was able to give more attention to the interdiction effort.^{8/}

(U) By September the enemy appeared to have recovered somewhat and began to accelerate his attacks throughout the country, particularly so in October. This was related to the progress in negotiations (see below) and the apparent imminence of a cease-fire. Both sides at this time made efforts to improve their positions as much as possible. Similarly, there was a great increase in political efforts on both sides, to try to ensure popular support after a cease-fire took effect.

Linebacker Operations

➤ The air war in the North increased in July and August by 6 percent each month, partly because reduced activity on the South Vietnamese battle fronts freed more sorties for Linebacker operations. In September, air action over the North declined somewhat because of weather.^{9/} The efforts by General Meyer and Admiral McCain to send more B-52 strikes over North Vietnam continued during July, August, and September but, as before, the JCS did not grant permission,* except for strikes against storage areas, LOCs, and troop concentrations in the southern part of North Vietnam during July and August.

*General Vogt seemed to share JCS reluctance about sending the B-52s into the North, pointing to their dependence on tactical air to get in and out because of the heavy SAM defenses and to some of the close calls B-52s had had. (Interview with Gen Vogt, in Porter, Linebacker (S), p 63.)

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~~TOP SECRET~~ Throughout this period enemy air defense activity remained at a high level. The SAMs continued to be the most effective enemy weapon, but the MIGs had also, in the words of General Vogt, "been getting to us." In May and early June, US aircraft had done better than 1 for 1 against the MIGs, but in late June and July the latter shot down 12 US planes, while losing 11 themselves. In August, however, the US reversed this ratio very dramatically, achieving a 4 to 1 ratio against the MIGs, which was sustained thereafter.^{10/} General Vogt ascribed this to adoption in early August of a much more sophisticated system for providing warning for US pilots. Under this system two previously used systems, "Disco" (USAF radar aircraft) and "Red Crown" (USN radar ship) were integrated with a weapon control facility, called "Teaball" set up at Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Base. General Vogt termed "Teaball" by far the most effective instrument in the battle of the MIGs in the entire war,* giving US fighter pilots air superiority over North Vietnam."^{11/}

U.S. Withdrawals Continue

(U) As fighting in the south declined, US withdrawal plans accelerated. On 1 July, Secretary Laird authorized the CJCS to redeploy

*A somewhat different view of the effectiveness of "Teaball" is expressed in the Project Red Baron studies by the USAF Tactical Fighter Weapons Center, which reported that aircrews rated the "Red Crown" system a more effective control agency than "Teaball." (Project Red Baron III, Air to Air Encounters in SEA (S), Vol. III, p. 92, USAF Tactical Fighter Weapons Center, Nellis AFB, NV, Jun 74.)

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additional US forces from South Vietnam "to reach a strength of no more than 39,000 by 1 September 1972."^{12/} Of the 10,000 personnel involved here, 1,354 were USAF, primarily in intelligence and logistics support functions.^{13/} On 15 August, Secretary Laird asked Admiral Moorer for the "current views of General Weyand [COMUSMACV] and yourself on recommended future redeployments of US forces from South Vietnam after 1 September 1972."^{14/} Both General Weyand and CINCPAC thought the 15,000 reduction by 1 November (as planned before the invasion) could not provide the capability to sustain the air effort at current levels. This could only be done if the reduction by 1 November did not exceed 10,000.^{15/} The JCS firmly seconded this view,^{16/} as did the Air Force.^{17/}

(U) Secretary Laird's response was a compromise: reduce to no more than 27,000 by 1 December.^{18/} This involved redeploying USAF units for a total of 3,208 spaces: two Special Operations Squadrons FOLs* (five AC-119Ks, two A-1s redeployed to Thailand); one Air Defense FOL (four F-4s); one Special Operations Squadron (A-37s turned over to VNAF); one Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron (ten EC-47s turned over to VNAF), tactical airlift support, logistics and other support personnel.^{19/}

*Forward Operating Locations

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Progress in Negotiations

(U) As the enemy offensive was increasingly contained, the Administration pushed ever more aggressively ahead with peace negotiations. These began to accelerate strongly in July and hopes for a cease-fire grew. Kissinger and Le Duc Tho met in Paris on 19 July and on 1 and 15 August. The Administration felt confident that the Soviets and Chinese were helping toward a settlement, and by mid-August Kissinger began receiving intelligence reports that Moscow and Peking were slowing down military supplies to North Vietnam.^{20/} In the second half of September Kissinger and Le Duc Tho reached agreement on a formula for a "National Council of Reconciliation and Concord" composed of three equal South Vietnamese political segments. And on 8 October Le Duc Tho presented a draft 9-point proposal on ending the war and restoring peace in Vietnam.^{21/}

Hanoi's Cease Fire Proposal

(U) Hanoi's proposal called for an immediate cease-fire in place in Vietnam, a total US withdrawal from Vietnam and return of all the American POWs within 60 days. Most importantly, for the first time Hanoi was ready to separate the military from the political aspects of the war, i.e., it accepted Kissinger's 2-track approach and did not make a cease-fire contingent upon a political solution. Further, it had dropped its demand for Thieu's ouster as a prior condition.^{22/} Kissinger cabled the contents of the agreement to the President, whose go-ahead came the next day. After 4 days of hours-long meetings,

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Kissinger and Tho reached an agreement in principle on 12 October. Tho insisting, however, that the accord be signed by 31 October. Kissinger flew home and presented a 58-page draft of the agreement to the President and State Department and CIA representatives, who reportedly found it basically acceptable, although a number of provisions had to be tightened.^{23/}

Negotiations and the Role of Vietnamization Equipment

(U) As peace efforts began to prosper and US withdrawals accelerated, there was again renewed emphasis on the Vietnamization program to make sure that the South Vietnamese would eventually be able to substitute completely for US withdrawal. There evolved during these weeks a close inter-relationship between negotiations and the implementation of equipment programs to beef up the South Vietnamese armed forces. There was a special urgency to carrying out the equipment programs because once an agreement was signed, cease-fire proposals forbade sending in more equipment except on a 1 for 1 basis. Moreover, the Administration was increasingly concerned that Congress would cut off funds for further military aid.

(U) The provision of additional equipment had particular significance in the case of the VNAF because of the important role air had so clearly played during recent months and because of President Nixon's faith in it as a crucial defense weapon for South Vietnam. In July he asked for a further review of the adequacy of the VNAF once US air

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was gone. Dr. Kissinger relayed this request to Secretary Laird^{24/} who in turn asked Secretary of the Air Force Seamans on 17 July to provide a study "which defines the options for providing a follow-on attack fighter aircraft for the VNAF."^{25/} He wanted to be certain that adequate assets could be made available for sustaining VNAF capabilities in all missions they performed. The study, done by an Air Staff ad hoc group, explored a broad range of alternatives and concluded that as US air efforts decreased, VNAF shortfalls would develop in the interdiction and CAS roles in high threat areas in RVN. The study therefore recommended that high performance fighters (specifically the F-5 or A-4) be introduced into the VNAF force structure. The Secretary of the Air Force proposed inclusion of one to three such squadrons in the FY 74-75 time frame.^{26/} General Vogt reportedly proposed that the VNAF receive 4-engine C-130s to modernize its transport fleet,^{27/} and F-5s and A-4s and A-7s as fighter bombers in place of their A-1s.^{28/} General Weyand, in an interview in late summer, said he believed the F-4 was probably the most sophisticated aircraft that could be provided in the near future.^{29/} Secretary Laird reiterated the long-standing US policy of not giving the VNAF sophisticated attack planes that would permit it to take the air war to North Vietnam.^{30/}

(U) Admiral Moorer, replying to Secretary Laird's request to review the study, recommended that "in view of the importance of the role played by air power in RVN and the extremely wide implications of changing or expanding the VNAF force structure," nothing be done

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till further review by the JCS and the field commanders.^{31/} This review came on 11 October. The JCS were skeptical and said flatly that there was no short-term solution, due to the long lead-time required to train pilots and maintenance personnel. Any precipitate insertion of a new weapon into the VNAF at this time would exacerbate an already critical situation and cause degradation of existing VNAF operational capabilities. The most feasible means of enhancing VNAF capabilities was to develop a 20-squadron fighter/attack force over the next 5 years, composed of eight F-5E squadrons and twelve A-37 squadrons.^{32/}

Project Enhance Plus

(U) Scarcely a week later however, on 20 October, Secretary Laird advised ^{33/} that President Nixon had directed shipment of 126 F-5As from MAP countries (Iran, Korea, and Taiwan), 66 A-37Bs (20 from TAC, 4 from Southern Command, 28 from AF Reserve, and 16 from ANG), 32 C-130As (16 from AF Reserve and 16 from ANG), and 277 UH-1s (from the US Army in SVN)--all to arrive in South Vietnam not later than 1 November. Further, all previously programmed aircraft for the VNAF were to arrive by the same date. This venture included outstanding actions on the CRIMP,* Project 981/982** and the Enhance

*Consolidated RVNAF Improvement and Modernization Program.

**A program instituted by Secretary Laird in April 1971 directing stockage levels to be maintained on RVNAF primary equipment, secondary items, ammunition, POL, etc.

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program begun in May 1972. This entire operation was to be known as Project Enhance Plus. While it also provided additional equipment for three artillery battalions, two tank battalions, and two air defense battalions for ARVN, the very great bulk of it consisted of aircraft.

(U) This sudden influx of 619 aircraft under Enhance Plus required much intensified planning for what turned out to be a greatly revised VNAF FY 73-74 force structure. At first, the planners debated whether to store the aircraft until the VNAF could train the required personnel or to develop a transition program to absorb the aircraft into the active flying inventory. The seriousness of the enemy threat dictated adoption of the latter alternative as rapidly as possible. To accomplish this, four measures were adopted: deactivate excess cargo aircraft, redistribute VNAF personnel, establish a trained VNAF instructor cadre while the USAF was still in the country, and provide for contract maintenance and training support after the USAF left.^{34/}

(U) All this great VNAF augmentation occasioned much discussion and criticism. A CINCPAC logistics paper noted that the number of aircraft being provided to the VNAF far exceeded its capability to fly or maintain. In the case of the C-130s, there was no capability at all, and contract personnel would be needed to store, maintain, and fly most of the Enhance Plus aircraft.^{35/} A South Vietnamese Army officer thought "the Americans have actually given us more equipment than we need"--what South Vietnam really needed was unity and a clean government.^{36/}

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TABLE 6 -- VNAF FORCE STRUCTURE

UNITS	AUTHORIZATION AS OF JAN 73	ACTIVE/OPNL AS OF JAN 73	FUTURE FORCE STRUCTURE
Fighter Squadrons.....	3—A-1 7—A-37 1—F5A	3/3 A-1 7/5 A-37 2/0-F5A**	3—A-1 10—A-37 6—F-5A — 19
Air Defense Squadrons.....	3—F-5E	0/0 F-5E	0
Gunship Squadrons.....	1—AC-47 1—AC-119G	1/1 AC-47 1/1 AC-119G	1—AC-47 1—AC-119G 1—AC-119K — 3
Helicopter Squadrons.....	16—UH-1 2—CH-47	16/16 UH-1*** 2/1 CH-47	21—UH-1 4—CH-47 — 25
Recon Squadrons.....	1—EC/RC-47 1—EC-47	1/1 EC/RC-47 1/0 EC-47	1—EC/RC-47 1—EC-47 1—RC-119G — 3
Transport Squadrons.....	1—C-119 1—C-47 3—C-123 3—C-7	0/0 C-119* 0/0 C-47* 1/1 C-123* 3/1 C-7 2/0 C-130**	3—C-7 2—C-130 — 5
Training Squadrons.....	1—T-41/ T-37/ UH-1	1/1 T-41/ T-37/ UH-1	2—T-41/ T-37/ UH-1
Liaison.....	8—O-1/U-17	8/7 O-1/U-17	8—O-2/U-17/ O-1
Special Air Mission Squadron.....	1—VC-47/ UH-1/ U-17	1/1 VC-47/ UH-1	1—VC-47/ UH-1/ U-17
TOTAL.....	54 Squadrons	51/39 Squadrons	66 Squadrons

*Units being inactivated to support ENHANCE PLUS. All would be inactivated by the end of January 1973.

**ENHANCE PLUS activations.

***Represents an increase of 3 squadrons at 38 UE each, increase of the UE of 16 existing squadrons from 33 to 38 aircraft, and formation of 2 SAR/MEDEVAC dedicated squadrons (one with 24 UE and one with 84 UE).

Source: MACDO

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Project Enhance Plus and Negotiations

(U) What the critics did not realize was that Enhance Plus was to be understood primarily in terms of its inter-relationship with the secret negotiations for a cease-fire. As noted above, the President's July suggestion to give more equipment to the VNAF had met with no enthusiasm from the JCS or the field commanders. The latter were not aware of the progress being made in the Paris talks, unlike Kissinger, who for this very reason was trying to press on with efforts to step up VNAF aid. For example, at a September WSAG* meeting Kissinger even optimistically raised the question: "What is required and how long will it take to make the VNAF self-sufficient enough so that US tactical air is no longer required?"^{37/} The JCS, on 11 October, could still only suggest that over the next five years [italics added], the VNAF could be developed into a 20 squadron fighter/attack force.^{38/} (See p. 129) When Kissinger arrived in Saigon a week later to get Thieu's concurrence on the cease-fire proposal however, the picture changed rapidly.

(U) Because the specific terms of the agreement between Washington and Hanoi had remained secret until Kissinger began his talks with Thieu on 18 October, neither Thieu nor US military officials knew what they were. The latter (as well as Thieu of course) reportedly reacted in dismay when they heard them, particularly the terms permitting North Vietnamese troops to remain in the South, and allowing only 1 for 1 replacement of military aid items. These officials--

*Washington Special Action Group, which consisted of Kissinger from the White House and top representatives from the Department of Defense, the JCS, CIA, and the State Department.

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Ambassador Bunker, General Abrams, and Admiral Noel Gayler (CINCPAC)-- felt that the proposed agreement would make survival of a non-Communist regime in the South very problematic.* The JCS, according to "reliable sources" in Paris, made their approval of the October draft conditional on a respite of several weeks to permit an airlift to furnish the Saigon regime with whatever equipment it needed for survival.^{39/} Thus the additional planes and equipment which only a week ago the JCS had recommended against sending, they now apparently demanded be sent at once. At any rate, on 20 October, President Nixon, who had been wanting to send more planes to South Vietnam all along, directed Project Enhance Plus, with its 619 additional aircraft to be delivered by 1 November.

(U) Beyond the urgent practical reasons advanced by the JCS for sending Enhance Plus equipment, there was also of course the Administration's thought that this massive additional aid would help "persuade" Thieu to go along with the draft agreement. And the fact that the initial 21 October order was for a 1 November delivery deadline indicates it was made in the hope and intent of assuring arrival of the equipment before the final agreement was signed on 31 October--as then planned.

*Kissinger obliquely acknowledged these objections in his "peace is at hand" speech, noting that while he was in Saigon he had had "extensive conversations with American officials, and it appeared that there were certain concerns and certain ambiguities in the draft agreement that we believe required modification and improvement."

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(U) When President Thieu still dragged his feet however and strongly rebuffed Dr. Kissinger in Saigon, President Nixon used the "persuasion" of Project Enhance Plus in reverse. On 21 October, after procedural directives on Project Enhance Plus had been disseminated and implementation actions were underway, the Defense Department ordered the Air Force Logistics Command to stop all actions pertaining to them.^{40/} This was done and all Enhance Plus aircraft and materiel, in varying stages of preparation and movement, were returned to the original sources and no USAF equipment left the United States. Then, on 25 October, "higher authority" directed^{41/} that Project Enhance Plus be reactivated. One Administration official, discussing this with Mr. William Beecher of the New York Times, said:

"Bear in mid that all this [Project Enhance Plus equipment] is contingent on the progress of negotiations. These assets can be used to pressure both North Vietnam and South Vietnam...if Mr. Thieu becomes 'unreasonable,' a slowdown might again become necessary...the fact that additional sophisticated weapons are headed for South Vietnam might also serve as as inducement to Hanoi to relent on some points to bring a cease fire--and an end to further weapons shipments--sooner rather than later."^{42/}

The 31 October Deadline Passes

(U) It is significant that when the Enhance Plus shipments were resumed on 25 October, the new delivery deadline was for 20 November.* This meant of course that the 31 October deadline for signing the peace agreement with Hanoi had been given up--as indeed it had. Despite all Kissinger's pleas and arguments, Thieu had remained

*This was later changed to 10 November.

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totally opposed to the agreement and Kissinger had so informed President Nixon on the 23d. He suggested that the US sign a separate peace with Hanoi, but the President ruled this out, and told Kissinger to wire Hanoi that the Saigon talks had hit a snag and that it would be difficult to sign the agreement on 31 October. To sugarcoat Tho's anticipated disappointment and underscore US determination to complete an agreement quickly, Kissinger was to inform Tho that the United States would suspend American bombing north of the 20th parallel.^{43/} Kissinger reportedly suggested that the US also end tactical air support to the ARVN to show US annoyance with Thieu, but President Nixon refused to do so.^{44/}

(U) The North Vietnamese at this point used their own form of pressure. Chagrined at not getting the agreement signed on 31 October, and apparently hoping to force the President's hand, they publicly broadcast the highlights of the hitherto secret peace agreement on 25 October. Next day Kissinger responded with the famous "peace is at hand" statement, aiming to reassure Hanoi and warn Saigon that the US was determined to press on to a settlement--as he said, "just one more negotiating session" would suffice. Le Duc Tho immediately proposed an early resumption of the Paris negotiations, but the President rejected this, preferring to wait. On 4 November, after a series of exchanges with Hanoi, Kissinger got its agreement to resume talks on 20 November.^{45/}

Negotiations After the Elections

(U) The President and Kissinger spent considerable time in the first week of November listing the positions they were now going to strive

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for at the reopened negotiations. For it had become increasingly clear in early November that the President was going to try to set a higher price on a settlement than before--higher than Kissinger reportedly believed was negotiable with the North Vietnamese.^{46/} As soon as the elections were over, the President dispatched Kissinger's deputy Gen. Alexander Haig, Jr. (US Army), to Saigon to tell Thieu that although Washington would do its best to improve the terms of the peace agreement, the President was determined to get an agreement and would go ahead, with or without Saigon's approval. Haig pointed to the airlift of equipment then under way as evidence of the President's friendship and honorable intentions. Despite hours of discussions, Thieu would not change his position. He insisted on a total pullout of North Vietnamese troops, demanded that Hanoi recognize the DMZ as a clear line of demarcation between North and South, and ruled out ceding sovereignty over any portion of South Vietnam.

(U) On 20 November, as agreed, Kissinger returned to Paris. At the first session, he put Thieu's minimum demands on the table and then, clearly differentiating, he presented President Nixon's demands. The latter included recognition of the DMZ as an inviolate border separating the two Vietnams, a token withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from South Vietnam's two northernmost provinces, a cease-fire throughout Indochina, and a strong international peacekeeping force. These all represented a hardening in the US position as compared to the October draft agreement. The demand for making the DMZ an inviolate border, for example, directly contradicted the first article in

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the October agreement which stipulated US recognition of Vietnam's "independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity as defined by the Geneva Accords"--i.e., with the DMZ as a temporary dividing line.^{47/}

(U) The talks continued for 4 days with Tho increasingly beginning to change some of his positions too. He revived his discarded demand for the ouster of Thieu and withdrew the earlier offer of a token withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops. Kissinger warned that the President had suspended the bombing of North Vietnam above the 20th parallel in the expectation that negotiations would proceed "seriously," implying that the bombing could be resumed at any time. Tho countered that the North Vietnamese were negotiating "seriously," and insisted that the Americans had introduced a whole new set of demands. "The October 31 deadline is past," he said angrily, "the election is over, and, from our point of view the war can indeed continue."

(U) According to Kissinger's biographers, he did not brush aside Tho's counterwarning as an empty threat. It instantly conjured up the depressing vision of a new Communist offensive, new American bombing, new Saigon bluster, and a new Congressional drive to end the war by legislation rather than by 'an act of diplomacy,' which had always been the Administration's goal. Later Kissinger theorized that after witnessing the US failure to meet the 31 October deadline, the sudden influx of some billion dollars worth of US war materiel into South Vietnam, and re-presentation now of Thieu's "minimum demands," the Hanoi Politburo (not uniformly sympathetic to the

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October agreement in any case) began to pull back. Or else, perhaps they had decided to wait for Congress to vote the US out of the war.* On 25 November both Kissinger and Tho agreed they should return home for further instructions.^{48/}

Intimations of Further Hostilities

(b) As we have seen, bombing north of the 20th parallel had stopped on 22 October as a mollifying gesture to Hanoi, but on 4 November the bombing of supply and storage areas was resumed. On 6 November the Joint Chiefs called for a 48-hour maximum air effort against targets near the DMZ--in response to intelligence reports** of an impending enemy push of supplies and equipment into RVN. This action was extended an additional 24 hours after which the JCS ordered a maximum air effort against military and logistics targets from the DMZ to the 20th parallel, to continue until further notice.^{49/}

(c) Then on 30 November (in the interval before Kissinger and Le Duc Tho resumed talks on 4 December), Admiral McCain wired General Meyer (CINCSAC), General Clay (CINCPACAF), and Adm. Bernard A. Clarey (CINCPACFLT) "we must be prepared for contingency of breakdown in cease-fire negotiations" and subsequent cancellation of restrictions on air operations above the 20th parallel. He asked for a plan for "an integrated and sustained air campaign against North Vietnam" to

*When the peace talks broke off in mid-December, Senator Mansfield suggested obliquely that there would be a renewed attempt in the Senate to force an end to American involvement in the war. Senator McGovern said "we must look again to the possibility of Congressional action to terminate any further American involvement in Indochina." (NY Times, 18 Dec 72)

**These were subsequently largely discredited.

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interdict the southward flow of supplies and to isolate the North Vietnamese "heartland"--where targets should be such that their destruction would achieve the maximum psychological impact while causing minimum risk to the population.^{50/}

(U) This chapter has detailed how continued operations against North Vietnamese forces in the south after July confirmed their defeat, and how US withdrawal plans accelerated as a result. It recounts the successful evolution of peace negotiations to the point where North Vietnam submitted a draft cease-fire proposal in October. It describes the US reaction to (at first approving, then disapproving) this proposal, including the sending of a tremendous new arms shipment to South Vietnam. Above all, it discusses President Nixon's rejection of the October peace terms in favor of trying for new, harsher terms after the election, and North Vietnam's firm rejection thereof.

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VII LINEBACKER II AND THE CEASE-FIRE AGREEMENT

(U) After months of preparations for a cease-fire, the end of the war came only after one last violent air campaign against North Vietnam in December--Linebacker II, or as it was also called, the "Christmas bombing." During the 11 days of this campaign, over 15,000 tons of bombs were dropped on targets in North Vietnam, practically all in the immediate vicinity of Hanoi and Haiphong. The Linebacker II campaign also unleashed a formidable torrent of public criticism, worldwide, against the US President and, indirectly, against the Air Force.

Paris Talks Resume in December

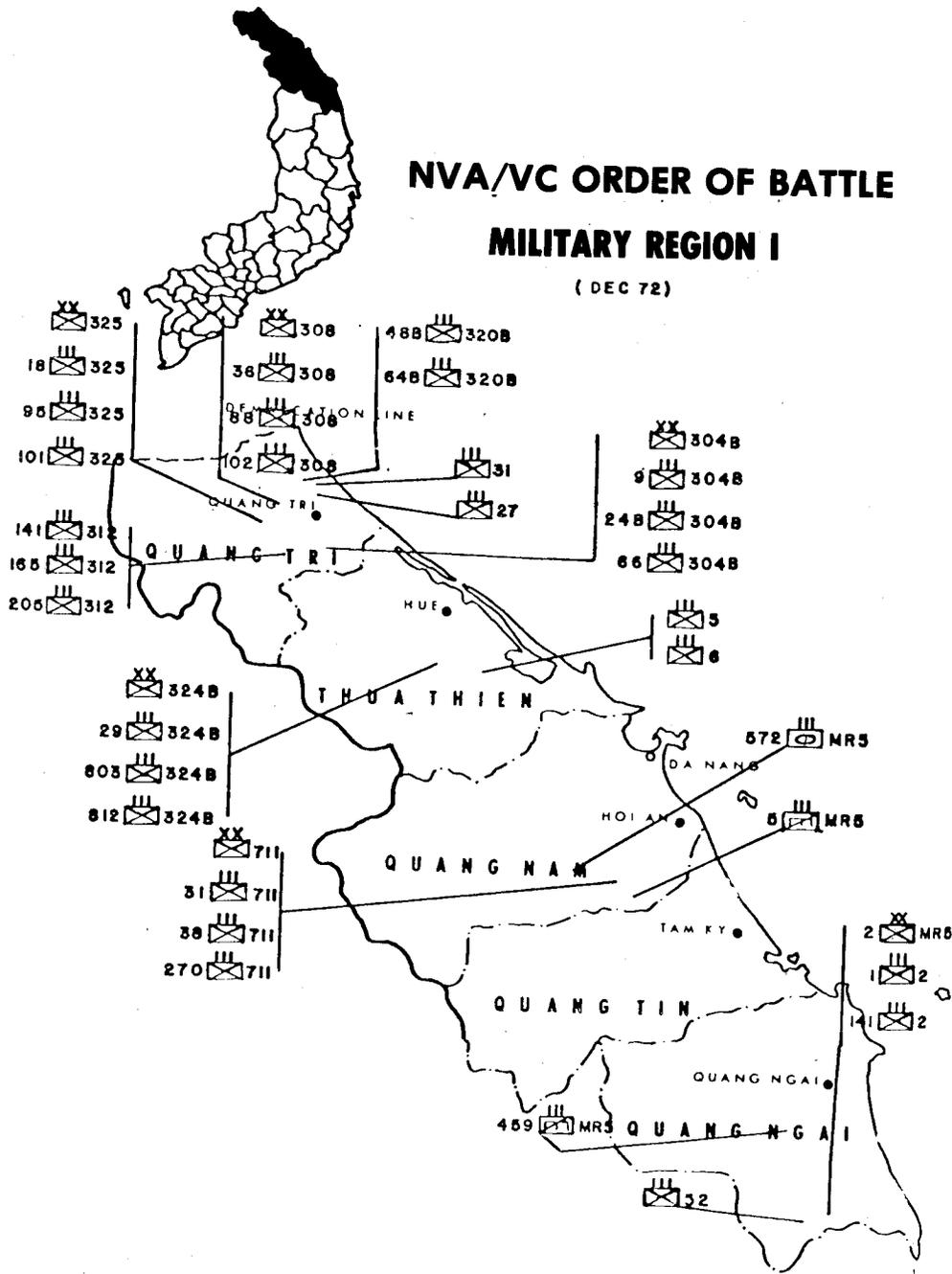
(U) When Kissinger, accompanied by Gen. Alexander Haig, returned to Paris on 4 December, he met a still stubborn North Vietnamese attitude. At times Tho appeared to be inching back toward concessions made earlier, only to change back later to hard line positions.^{1/} By 12 December the unresolved issues were clear: Kissinger could not get Tho to accept the DMZ as a firm border between the two Vietnams^{2/} and could not get Thieu to cede any trace of sovereignty to the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG).* As the North Vietnamese saw it, to recognize the DMZ as a border line would imply recognition of Thieu's regime, the political issue that the war was all about. They believed Ho Chi Minh had been tricked out of victory by the French in 1946, and then by the Geneva Accords in 1954. Now they feared Nixon was about to play the biggest trick of all by trying to

*The VC political representation.

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NVA/VC ORDER OF BATTLE MILITARY REGION I

(DEC 72)



Source: MACDI

MAP 10

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impose his will through renewed bombing* if he couldn't get his way at the negotiating table.^{3/} They appeared willing to continue the war rather than yield. This of course was the one thing the Administration could not afford--to have the war go on. On 13 December, with matters completely deadlocked, both negotiators left Paris, leaving their deputies behind.

(U) Back in Vietnam the war was continuing. The Viet Cong had just made its fiercest rocket attack on Tan Son Nhut airport in 4 years and US warplanes continued their heavy bombing of enemy supply routes and positions.

Breakdown of Talks

(U) On returning to Washington, Kissinger reported to the President on the morning of the 14th, and over the next 2 days spent almost 8 hours discussing the situation with him. One of the first things the President did was to dispatch a strongly worded cable to Hanoi, warning that "serious negotiations" would have to be resumed within 72 hours--or else bombing of the North would be resumed. Then he had Kissinger brief his version of the Paris negotiations to top Government officials: Rogers, Laird, Helms, Admiral Moorer, Vice-President Agnew, and the immediate White House staff.^{4/}

(U) On 16 December, Kissinger explained on television why the peace talks had broken down and indicated strongly that future developments lay with the President. "We have not reached an agreement that the

*That they seemed prepared for this was apparent in an intelligence report--received by Kissinger on 3 December--that school children were being evacuated from Hanoi. (M & B Kalb, Kissinger, p. 406.)

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President considers just and fair," said Kissinger. "If we can get an agreement that the President considered just, we will proceed with it." He assured Hanoi that the United States still wanted peace along the lines of the 8 October agreement but warned that time was running out.^{5/}

Preparations for Renewed Bombing

~~(S)~~ During Kissinger's briefings of top officials, he asked Admiral Moorer how many B-52s were operational throughout the world and reportedly found him unenthusiastic about using these expensive aircraft over North Vietnam in bad weather--as he assumed the President had in mind to do.^{6/} Admiral Moorer may not have been enthusiastic, but General Meyer and Admiral Gayler had been urging greater use of B-52s over the North for some time (see pp. 78-80). On 30 November, as noted above, Admiral Gayler had asked for a plan for a "sustained attack against the North Vietnam "heartland."^{7/} To SAC analysts, this "clearly reflected the strong possibility the United States might undertake renewed offensive operations against North Vietnam in the near future," and in early December their intelligence specialists refined the list of suitable B-52 targets in North Vietnam to some 60 targets.^{8/}

(TS) On 14 December the JCS authorized resumption of manned tactical photographic reconnaissance sorties over North Vietnam north of the 20th parallel not later than 16/0500Z on 16 December.^{9/} The next day Admiral Moorer notified Admiral Gayler and General Meyer that air and naval gunfire operations would be resumed against targets north of the 20th parallel at approximately 1200Z (1900 Hanoi time)

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on 17 December for a maximum 3-day effort. He forwarded a list of 14 targets authorized and appropriate for B-52 strikes.^{10/} Later that day (the 15th) however, the JCS delayed the execution time for the operation, setting it back to 1200Z on 18 December.^{11/}

Linebacker II

~~(S)~~ By the afternoon of 17 December, time had run out on President Nixon's 72-hour ultimatum to Hanoi. He thereupon ordered resumption of concentrated US air attacks against North Vietnam, including use of B-52s over Hanoi and Haiphong, beginning late that evening, Washington time.* That same evening the JCS alerted CINCPAC and CINCSAC that the operation could be extended beyond the envisioned 3-day limit.^{11/} Early on the 18th, Admiral Moorer sent Admiral Gayler a message that included the following:

Linebacker II offers the last opportunity in Southeast Asia for USAF and USN to clearly demonstrate the full professionalism, skill and cooperation so necessary to achieve the required success in the forthcoming strikes in North Vietnam.... You will be watched on a real-time basis at the highest levels here in Washington. We are counting on all hands to put forth a maximum, repeat maximum, effort in the conduct of this crucial operation.^{13/}

*On the same day that the bombing resumed General Haig flew to Saigon with a letter from the President urging Thieu to accept the settlement. If he did not, the US would sign a separate peace with North Vietnam, and all military and economic aid to South Vietnam would be cut off. Thieu, elated at the resumption of the bombing, found himself weakening in the face of Nixon's ultimatum. In a detailed letter to Nixon, brought back by General Haig, he yielded on several critical points. He would agree to North Vietnamese troops remaining in the South, cede some sovereignty to the PRG, accept Kissinger's assurances that the National Council would not become a coalition and that Russia and China might reduce their arms deliveries to North Vietnam. (M & B Kalb, Kissinger, p. 415.)

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(U) At a press conference later that same day, White House Press Secretary Ronald Ziegler indicated that Linebacker II would continue for some time, as distinguished from a single "hard knock" series of raids to make a diplomatic point. He said the policy would continue "until such time as a settlement is arrived at," adding that "we stand ready to end the conflict rapidly." This of course was the Administration's hope and aim. As Ziegler said, "It is the President's view that neither side can gain from prolonging the war or from prolonging the peace talks."^{14/}

Operations from 18-24 December

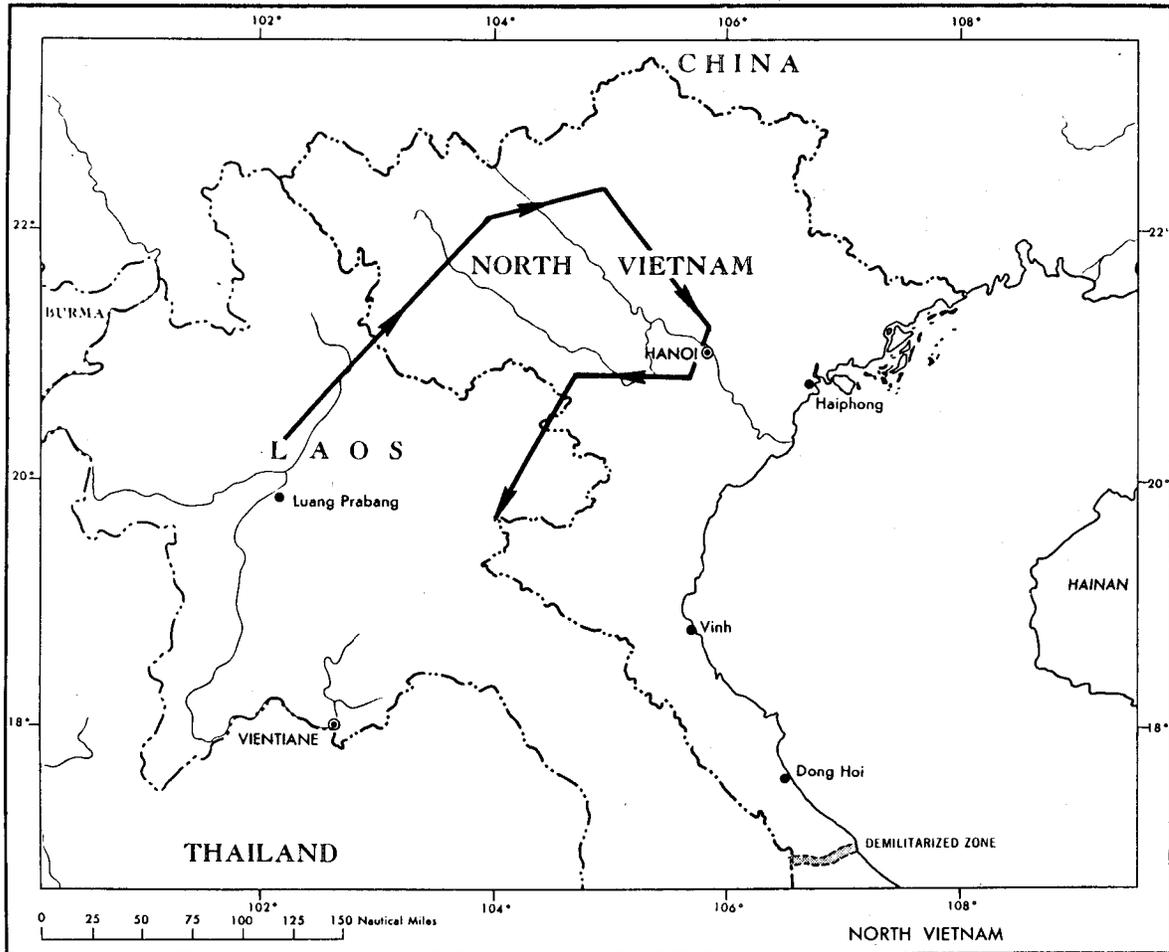
(U) During the first 3 days of Linebacker II, a total of 315 B-52 sorties struck 11 target complexes in the Hanoi area--at night, as was the case throughout Linebacker II. The bombers flew in three successive waves each night, and were preceded by support aircraft including CAP/ESCORT, SAM suppression aircraft and chaff dispensing aircraft. Enemy air defense proved to be fierce. On the first day, out of 121 sorties flown, three bombers were downed by SAMs and two damaged, with some 200 SAM firings tallied by the B-52 crews. MIGs also attacked the B-52s in the first and third waves, suffering one loss.^{15/}

TABLE 7 -- SUPPORT FORCES FOR 18-20 DECEMBER 1972, LINEBACKER II

<u>WAVE I</u>	<u>WAVE II</u>	<u>WAVE III</u>	<u>MISSION</u>
8 F-105	10 F-105	4 A-7 (USN)	SAM Suppression
15 F-4	15 F-4	15 F-4	Escort
10 F-4	10 F-4	10 F-4	Migcap
8 F-4	8 F-4	8 F-4	Chaff
3 EB-66	3 EB-66	3 EB-66	EW
		5 EA-3B (USN)	EW

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B-52 ROUTING 18-20 DECEMBER 1972



B-52s — Days 1-3 (18-20 Dec 72)

18 Dec	129
19 Dec	93
20 Dec	<u>93</u>

315

SOURCE: XOOG EXECUTIVE SERVICES

MAP 11

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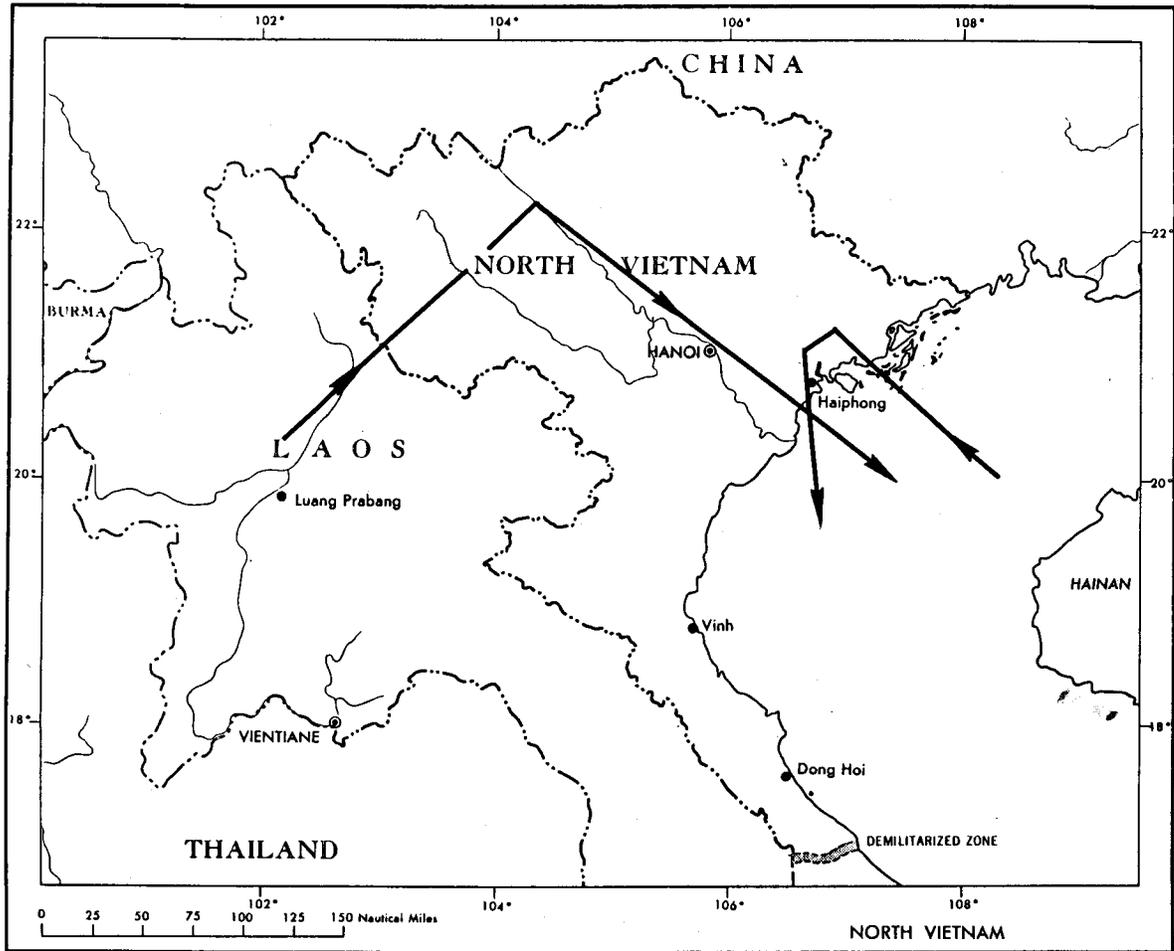
~~(S)~~ On the second day of Linebacker II, 93 sorties were launched against targets in the Hanoi area, with no bombers lost and only two damaged, even though over 180 SAM firings were reported by crews. The Eighth Air Force had inaugurated some tactical changes that may have improved survivability against the SAMs: crews were directed to fly closer to the chaff corridor; alternating cells were ordered to fly at base altitudes of 34,500 and 35,000 feet; time separation between cells was extended to 4 minutes to allow more maneuvering room. Also for 19 December only, evasive action was authorized enroute to the target and on withdrawing.^{16/} (See Map 11.) Toward the close of the 19th, the JCS instructed CINCPAC and CINCSAC to continue Linebacker II air and naval gunfire operations beyond the 3-day limit until further notice.^{17/}

(TS) On 20 December, using tactics very similar to those of the day before, B-52s struck the Hanoi Railroad Yard at Gia Lam and other target complexes in the area. Six B-52s were lost to SAM fire, making this the costliest day of the Linebacker II campaign.^{18/} Over 220 SAMs were fired, some 130 of them during the attack on one particular target, the Yen Vien Complex.^{19/} CINCPAC and SAC staffs conferred as to how the Pacific Command could best aid SAC's Linebacker II effort. General Meyer told Admiral Gayler that maximum around-the-clock SAM and airfield suppression strikes in the Hanoi and Haiphong areas was the most helpful measure--above all, suppression strikes on SAMs just prior to arrival of B-52s over the target.^{20/}

~~(S)~~ The 21 December bombing effort scheduled only 30 sorties, which struck the Quang Te airfield, the Van Dien supply depot, and the

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B-52 ROUTING 21-24 DECEMBER 1972



B-52s — Days 4-7 (21-24 Dec 72)

21 Dec	30
22 Dec	30
23 Dec	30
24 Dec	<u>30</u>

120

SOURCE: XOOG EXECUTIVE SERVICES

MAP 12

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Hanoi storage area at Bac Mai. For the first time in the campaign, the bombers were ordered to take a "wet feet" withdrawal route from the target areas, to the southeast over the Gulf of Tonkin. (See Map 12.) There was a heavy SAM environment around all targets and two B-52s took mortal hits from SAMs while striking the Bac Mai target.^{21/} On 22 December targets in the Haiphong area were selected for the first time. Tactics were altered considerably in the continuing effort to improve the B-52s' chance of survival, and for the first time, the bombers approached their target from the seaward side and exited in the same direction.^{22/} Headquarters SAC asked CINCPAC for a maximum effort against all SAM sites in the Haiphong area by Pacific Fleet A-6s--augmented by all available Navy and Air Force Iron Hand* and ECM support--prior to the arrival of the first B-52 over the target.^{23/} All 30 sorties on the 22d were effective and none of the aircraft was downed or damaged by SAMs, 43 of which had been sighted by crews during the strikes.

(S) Admiral Moorer had instructed CINCPAC and CINCSAC to include targets within the buffer zone adjacent to the People's Republic of China, while cautioning SAC not to penetrate the Chinese border. The target he specifically selected was the Lang Dang railroad yard, and on 23 December this and three SAM sites south of it were the main targets of attacks. The bomber force approached the targets from the Gulf of Tonkin and then split, two cells attacking the SAM sites from the east and the remaining eight attacking Lang Dang from the southeast. The entire force was effective, and for the second day in a

*SAM and radar-controlled AAA suppression flown by specially equipped F-105s.

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row, no B-52s were lost or damaged due to SAM fire--only four SAMs being fired at the B-52s over both targets.^{24/} On 24 December 30 B-52s struck the railroad yards at Kep and Thai Nguyen. Again, all bombers were effective and none lost or damaged by SAM fire, although one B-52 received minor flak damage in the only case of AAA damage to these aircraft during Linebacker II operations. There were 19 SAM firings reported by crews in the attack on the Thai Nguyen yards, while SAM operations in the bombing of the Kep yards were listed as moderate.^{25/}

The Christmas Pause and Last Days of Bombing

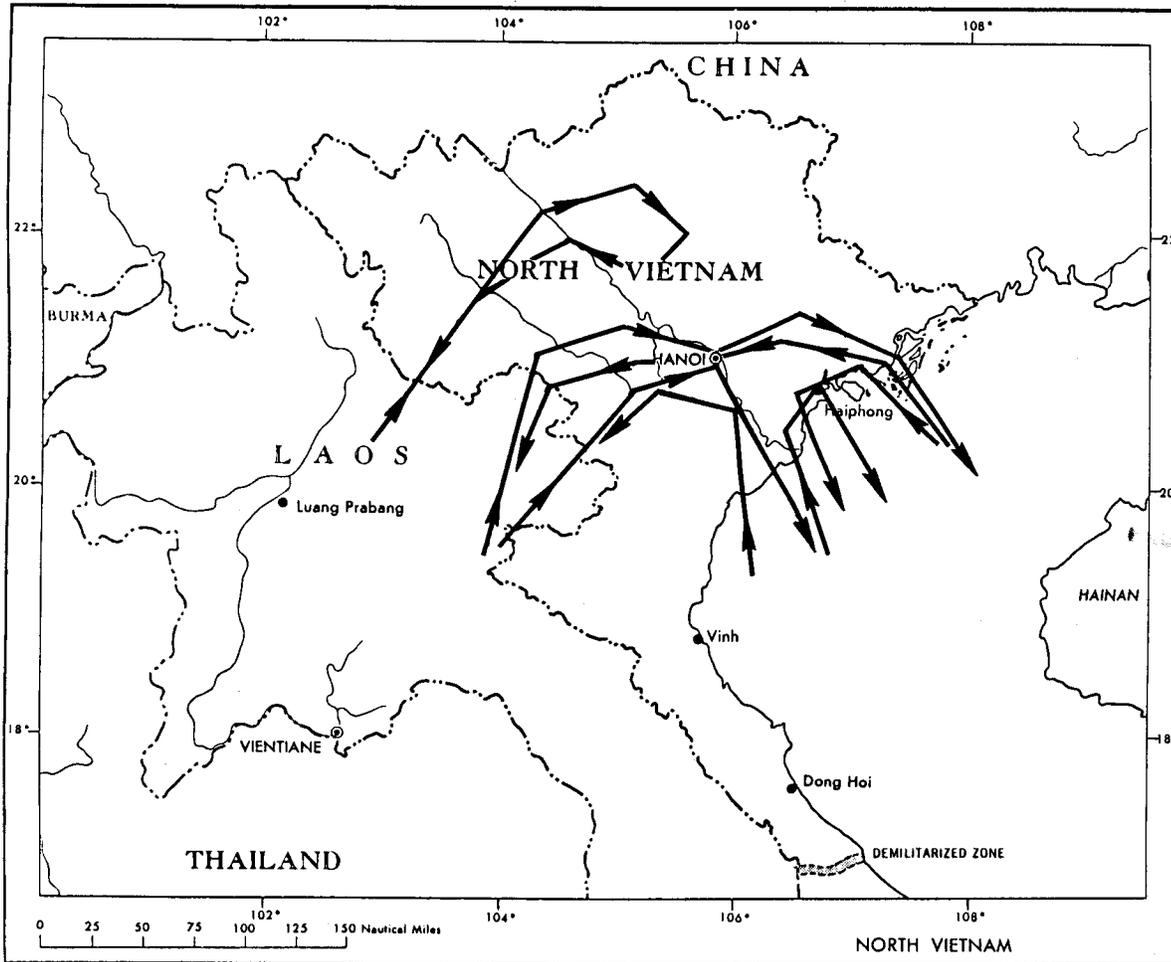
~~█~~ On 23 December 1972 the JCS ordered a Christmas pause in Linebacker II operations from 1700 Greenwich mean time on the 24th to 0459 on the 26th of December*. The message directed that no announcement of the stand-down be made in advance--the US command in Saigon would announce resumption of the bombing after the pause was over. All answers to queries on suspension of the bombing were to be "we do not discuss operational matters."^{26/} A later message on 23 December outlined bombing plans for after the pause. These included continuous bombing of authorized targets in the Hanoi area, destruction of power plants, and isolation of Hanoi from the rest of North Vietnam by attacking geographical, electrical and logistic targets linking it to other parts of the country.^{27/} According to

*This message superseded two earlier ones of 22 and 23 December which had directed Christmas pauses of 30 and 42 hours, respectively--as opposed to the 36-hour pause ordered in this message. (Hanoi, according to a NY Times story of 27 December, reported the suspension as lasting 41½ hours.)

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B-52 ROUTING 26-29 DECEMBER 1972



B-52s — Days 9-12 (26-29 Dec 72)

26 Dec	116
27 Dec	60
28 Dec	59
29 Dec	<u>59</u>
	294

SOURCE: XOOG EXECUTIVE SERVICES

MAP 13

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news stories from Hanoi and Saigon, the North Vietnamese used the Christmas bombing halt to evacuate some 400,000 of Hanoi's residents to the countryside.^{28/}

(U) Immediately following the Christmas suspension, CINCPAC and CINCSAC, as ordered, resumed the air campaign over targets north of the 20th parallel with maximum effort. The bombing on the 26th marked the second largest B-52 effort in Linebacker II operations thus far and differed markedly from the attacks of the previous 7 days. All B-52s struck in a single wave (with all TOTs compressed into a 15-minute span) that divided into 10 bomber streams attacking their 10 targets from a variety of axes of attack. (See Map 13.) The targets were primarily railroad yards in the Hanoi and Haiphong areas. Some 70 SAMs were fired at the B-52s, downing 2 of them and damaging another 2.^{29/}

~~(S)~~ On the 27th, sixty B-52s struck the Lang Dang and Trung Quang railroads, the Duc Noi storage area, and three SAM sites. Tactical planners again made every effort to avoid stereotyped routing and maneuvering profiles, but SAM firings again downed two B-52s and damaged another two. In planning for this attack, the weight of effort against the Lang Dang railroad yard was increased three times. According to the Assistant DCS for Intelligence at Headquarters SAC, Colonel Dante Bulli, this was "predicated on desire of high national authorities to achieve a quote high PD [probability of destruction] unquote on the target area"^{30/} There was some indication that this emphasis stemmed from the fact that SAMs from China were arriving via the Lang Dang railroad.^{31/}

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(U) On the 28th, sixty B-52s again struck 3 SAM sites, the Duc Noi storage area, and the Lang Dang railroad yard, the latter getting the largest strike, 24 sorties. Forty-eight SAM firings were reported, but no B-52s suffered damage. On the final day of Linebacker II B-52 operations, 29 December, 60 bombers struck SAM storage areas at Trai Ca and Phuc Yen, and the Lang Dang railroad yard. Monitors detected 25 SAM firings, but no B-52 losses or damage occurred.^{32/}

(U) In summary, during Linebacker II operations, 714 B-52 sorties dropped over 15,000 tons of bombs on 34 targets vital to the enemy's warmaking capability, primarily in the Hanoi/Haiphong areas.^{33/}

Although the B-52 attacks received most attention because of their spectacular destructive capability, tactical strike forces flew almost as many sorties--659. F-111s and USN tactical air struck at night, providing diversionary attacks and SAM suppression. The A-7s and F-4s operated during daylight and were limited by weather considerations throughout. For example, LGB-equipped F-4s were scheduled almost every day but, due to weather, had to cancel on all but three days. Similarly, weather forced the Navy to divert or cancel all but 238 of 1212 scheduled strike sorties. Tactical air also flew 1114 support sorties to protect both strategic and tactical strike operations.^{34/}

(U) As a result of Linebacker II operations, Hanoi's rail transport--the highest priority target--was thoroughly crippled and POL storage capacity reduced an estimated 3-million gallons. In the second priority effort, airfields and SAM sites were repeatedly struck by both B-52s and tactical air to try to suppress enemy defenses, particularly MIGs and SAMs. Another target, North Vietnam's electrical

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power capacity, was reduced to approximately 10 percent of what it had been in early 1972, much of it destroyed during Linebacker I and subsequently rebuilt, now being reattacked. F-4s dropping guided bombs made six direct hits on the Hanoi thermal plant and B-52 strikes on various electrical power plants destroyed 12 buildings and damaged 133.^{35/}

(U) The enemy fired 1,250 SAMs to counter Linebacker II operations, over half of them during the first 3 days. There was no question but that the SAMs went for the B-52s. Out of the 1,250 SAM firings, 1,032 were directed against B-52s,^{36/} causing the loss of 15, significant damage to 3 more, and minor damage to 6.^{37/} Tactical air losses to SAMs were three aircraft. The expected heavy MIG concentration against Linebacker II aircraft did not materialize, although MIG-21s downed two USAF F-4s and one USN RA-5. Five MIGs were downed in air-to-air combat: 2 by USAF F-4s, 1 by a USN F-4J, and 2 by B-52 tailgunners. Enemy AAA fire accounted for 1 USN A-7 and 1 A-6, and 1 Marine F-4 aircraft.^{38/}

The Bombing Ends

~~(S)~~ At 1407Z on the 29th, Admiral Moorer, acting on instructions from higher authority, ordered his commanders in the Pacific to cease all military operations in North Vietnam and adjacent waters north of the 20th parallel beginning at midnight. Ongoing search and rescue efforts could be completed and reconnaissance north of the 20th parallel could be continued, but with SR-71s and drones only. He said he recognized the shortness of the notice, but asked PACOM and SAC to do their best to reorient scheduled air operations to insure

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a smooth transition and minimum visibility, making it clear that "the objective is to prevent queries and speculation until forthcoming events unfold." He also directed them to "initiate no statement and to stonewall all queries" from the press by saying "we do not discuss on-going military operations."^{*39/}

(U) Early on 30 December, the Deputy White House Press Secretary Gerald Warren told reporters that negotiations between Presidential adviser Henry Kissinger and North Vietnam's senior adviser would be resumed in Paris on 8 January. Lower level peace talks resumed in Paris 5 days after the campaign ended, and Kissinger and Le Duc Tho resumed their discussions on 8 January. These led to the signing of a final agreement on 17 January 1973.

~~(S)~~ As evident in Admiral Moorer's order cited above, the circumstances surrounding the ending of the bombing were shrouded in the same secrecy that had characterized the whole Linebacker II operation. Warren's White House announcement concerning the bombing halt did not itself mention the end of the bombing--this came out only in response to persistent questioning by news correspondents.** This same reluctance was evident in a telegram reportedly sent by OSD Press Secretary Jerry W. Friedheim to major US military commanders the day the bombing was halted:

*On the same day, Admiral Moorer asked Hq SAC for a complete summary of B-52 operations in Linebacker II to aid him in answering questions before Congressional committees--he didn't want "to do or say anything not in line with the Air Force's and SAC's evaluation of the facts, data and judgments on B-52 Linebacker II operations." (Msg (TS), JCS to CINCSAC, 28/1940Z Dec 72, cited in SAC Linebacker II Chronology (TS), p. 294.)

See **Appendix for transcript of this White House news conference.

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The White House has this morning made an announcement of international consequence concerning the resumption of peace negotiations and a suspension of some military activities in Southeast Asia. There must be absolutely no, repeat no, comment of any sort whatsoever from any DOD personnel, civilian and military, of whatever rank. There is to be no comment, no speculation, no elaboration and no discussion on the subject involved in the White House announcement. Should any queries be received by anyone they must be turned away without comment.^{40/}

Evaluations of Linebacker II

As might be expected, military leaders made numerous postoperational analyses of Linebacker II. Most of these emphasized the necessity for prestrike measures to protect the B-52s. A preliminary JCS assessment said that more effective jamming and SAM-suppression strikes (including Iron Hand) were required in a high threat environment like Hanoi-Haiphong. It noted, among other "lessons learned," that strikes against SAM sites should be scheduled prior to the B-52s' arrival over the target; that the B-52s should make minimum turns in the SAM threat ring; and that flight levels must be within the chaff cloud.^{41/} A mid-January 1973 memo by CINCPAC Intelligence said:

...No similar undertaking should be made before first assuring as high safety/low risk conditions for our forces as possible.... As a first order of business for a Linebacker III operation, it would appear prudent to deal with NVN defenses as a priority 1 target system, a defense target system which must be blunted at the onset of new operations. These attacks required a substantial portion of our all-weather F-111, A-7, and B-52 fleet operating against SAM sites, GCI sites, EW facilities, radio facilities, air fields, SAM support facilities. These attacks must continue on a coordinated basis prior to and during all subsequent strikes against "Heartland" targets. It is

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also important that our tactical forces conduct a methodical pre-suppression of defense, in order to create defense corridors for follow-on strike forces.*42/

(U) There were even more non-military assessments and evaluations of the Christmas bombing, partly of course because it had occasioned such consternation and comment in the press and public both at home and abroad. Significantly, after the bombing ended, there was considerable revision of the view that it had been a series of mindless terrorist attacks. As the London Economist wrote in a January issue, the bombing was "much less bloody than most people thought it was while it was going on, and than some of the wilder comparisons with the Second World War are still making it sound." With Hanoi's own report of 1318 casualties for the 11-day campaign, it became clear that the B-52s and jet fighter-bombers had indeed been striking military targets with great accuracy and had not been engaging in terror bombing.**

(U) There was even acknowledgement--and not just by military personnel--that perhaps such bombing was after all a cost-effective strategy. Orr Kelly, writing in the 9 January 1973 Washington Star and News, said:

*This memo is indicative of CINCPAC's apparent readiness to assume future "Linebacker IIs"--as promised by Nixon if Hanoi violated the cease fire.

** The Economist recollected that back in 1965, long before the US ground expansion began, military leaders had proposed just such a swift series of air blows and mining of Haiphong harbor, but had been consistently overruled by the then Secretary of Defense, Robert S. McNamara.

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The purpose of this column is to fly in the face of the conventional wisdom and to suggest that the intensive bombing campaign against the Hanoi-Haiphong area in the final two weeks of 1972 may be seen by future leaders as proof that bombing can achieve maximum results at minimal cost.... What were, in some respects, the heaviest raids in the history of warfare...were carried out with a loss of only 28 planes and 84 men killed or missing.... The loss of North Vietnamese lives was small compared with the saturation bombing of World War II. Both the North Vietnamese and American military experts agree that the bombing caused enormous physical damage.... Future presidents will certainly be able to draw the conclusion that bombing can be a "cheap" way of applying heavy military pressure in a very short period of time. Bombing may well appear, as they say, "an attractive option."

(U) Some analysts were sure that Linebacker II operations had brought the North Vietnamese back to the negotiating table.* "Top US military men are convinced it was the massive Christmastime bombing of North Vietnam that broke the will of Communist leaders in Hanoi and forced them to come to terms," said the US News and World Report of 5 February 1973. And Joseph Alsop said confidently, "There is no question at all that the renewed bombing got the President what he was aiming for."^{43/} Others were more cautious when asked the effect of the bombing on the final agreement. The official SAC history for the period was noticeably conservative: "How great a role the B-52 bombings played in the larger arena of world politics cannot yet be accurately ascertained. That it played a significant role most probably cannot be denied."^{44/} Gen. George S. Brown, CSAF, was likewise restrained in his comment. Citing the US Strategic Bombing Survey,

*They had in fact not really left it, saying merely that they would not negotiate while the bombing was going on; whereas the US had said it would not stop the bombing until a settlement had been reached.

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and its conclusion that Allied airpower was decisive in the war in western Europe, he went on to say in regard to Linebacker II:

Both our President and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, have, in the recent past, recognized the vital effectiveness of air power--once the rules which restricted its effective employment were relaxed--in contributing to an end to the hostilities in Southeast Asia and to the release of our prisoners."^{45/}

(U) Secretary Rogers, asked about Linebacker II effectiveness, said he supposed it didn't do much good to speculate about it. It was the President who had made the judgment--"a tough one--and we know what followed, and all we can say is that it worked out satisfactorily." He said he was "not sure it does any good to talk about it and hence would rather not get involved."^{46/} Dr. Kissinger, when specifically asked, said:

I was asked in October whether the bombing or mining of May 8 brought about the breakthrough in October, and I said then that I did not want to speculate on North Vietnamese motives. I have too much trouble analyzing our own.

I will give the same answer to your question, but I will say that there was a deadlock which was described in the middle of December, and there was a rapid movement when negotiations resumed on the technical level on January 2 and on the substantive level on January 8. These facts have to be analyzed by each person by himself.^{47/}

At a later interview, on 1 February, he was equally vague. "Now, whatever the reason, once the talks were resumed, a settlement was reached fairly rapidly. And I have--we have--never made an assertion as to what produced it."^{48/}

(U) There were some, including officials and specialists who had followed the negotiations closely, who were quite skeptical, indeed cynical. Richard Helms, CIA Director, reportedly told a secret

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session of a Senate committee that the bombing had not seriously impaired North Vietnam's ability to continue to wage war--and had not undermined Hanoi's morale or will to carry on.^{49/} Various US officials reportedly believed it was not the bombing that brought Hanoi back to the peace table, but US readiness to sign an agreement essentially as outlined in October.^{50/} Tad Szulc quotes a "key official" as saying, during Linebacker II operations, "we are bombing them to force them to accept our concessions."^{51/} Another official, cited by the Kalb brothers in their book on Kissinger, said: "That enormous bombing made little critical difference. What the B-52s did was to get the margin in January pretty much back to where it was in October, and by then that's all we wanted."^{52/}

Why the Bombing Was Ordered

(U) Throughout Linebacker II, the whole country and indeed the world, kept asking why, after peace seemed so near--and especially at Christmastime--the bombing of the North was ordered. In the face of the disparate views expressed and the official secrecy still shrouding the matter, it appears desirable to seek--insofar as is possible with available sources--some answers to this question. Otherwise, the criticisms of the bombing as "mindless" and unjustified will tend to persist.

(U) The "answer" has to rest primarily in the Administration's objectives in regard to Southeast Asia at the time. These were two-fold. First and foremost, the Administration both wanted and had to end the US involvement in the Vietnam war. At the same time, however, it wanted to retain a US position of influence in Southeast Asia. All

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the negotiations from summer 1972 through October had been directed toward these ends. As the time grew shorter for the Administration, first priority went increasingly toward simply ending the fighting in Vietnam, withdrawing US troops and returning US prisoners of war. Success in these efforts came with the agreement negotiated by Kissinger in October.

Ambiguity of the October Agreement

(U) A major part of our "answer" has to go back to this October agreement which was agreed to in principle by the President and his main advisers at that time (see Ch. VI, p. 127). Two aspects of the agreement contributed particularly to subsequent developments, including--ultimately--the bombing of Hanoi in December. The first was the agreement's ambiguity, the second was its secrecy.

(U) Because of the calculated ambiguity of the October agreement, it meant different things to different people. To the realists like the President, Kissinger, Secretary Laird and most policy makers and analysts, the agreement was a cease-fire, nothing more. They called it a peace settlement, but they knew no real peace settlement was feasible. The massive efforts of preceding years had not brought victory; there was no way to get the 15 North Vietnamese divisions out of South Vietnam and the US had already agreed they could stay;^{53/} the US public increasingly perceived the war as a futile, unending drain of its resources; and Congress was set to put an end to it if the President and Dr. Kissinger did not. The whole aim of President Nixon's Vietnamization program since 1969 had been directed to getting the US out of the war by turning it over to the South

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Vietnamese themselves. The same aim was behind his cease-fire proposal of October 1970, reaffirmed on 25 January and 8 May 1972. The 1972 October agreement arranged by Kissinger and Le Duc Tho was simply a further effort to execute and legalize the US withdrawal. It made no pretense of getting a political settlement, specifically leaving this to be settled between the North and the South at a later date.

(U) To the hard liners and defenders of the war however--above all to President Thieu--an agreement meant something altogether different. It was unthinkable to even consider any agreement unless it was a peace settlement, "just and fair," especially to South Vietnam. It was inconceivable that the United States could yield to Hanoi. There had to be a way to make Hanoi submit and to maintain South Vietnam's position and that of the US as well. Influential members of this group in both Saigon and Washington charged that the proposed October peace was a phony peace, that Hanoi would break the cease-fire and start up the war again, as soon as the Americans were out. Ambassador Bunker was a leading partisan of this group. Two members of Kissinger's own staff, Haig and John D. Negroponte, believed the agreement was too loose--or as Haig put it, had given away too much--and had to be tightened. President Nixon was won over to that view, and when North Vietnam refused in the November-December negotiations to agree to such a "tightening," unleashed the bombing in an effort to force them to do so.^{54/}

The Role of Secrecy

(U) The second key factor in the agreement was its secrecy--up until Kissinger took it to Saigon in October to get Thieu's acceptance. The

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disclosure, for the first time, in Saigon of the specifics of the secret peace terms set off a chain reaction of alarm not only within the Saigon government but among certain US military and political officials who saw the agreement as leading to Saigon's ultimate downfall. This reaction was not long in reaching the President--via Thieu's infuriated responses to Kissinger, and via certain factions in the US only too willing to discredit Kissinger for having been too liberal with the Communists in Hanoi. US domestic reactionary elements added their voice to Thieu's loud charges of "sell-out." All this was given a much wider audience and impetus when North Vietnam on 25 October made public the terms of the hitherto secret draft agreement.

(U) The secrecy and the ambiguity surrounding the proposed cease-fire and all the conflicting reports on it, brought the President under considerable cross-fire just about a week before the election. Just at this time too, a new factor was introduced: "firm intelligence" (based on captured documents) to the effect that North Vietnam was planning an offensive at the time of the cease-fire.^{*55/} Regardless of the truth or falsity of these charges and countercharges, the President seemed to fear the greater political problems if he signed immediately only to be confronted with a possible new enemy offensive that could bring down the Saigon government while US forces were still there. He wanted to get out and intended to do so, but as

*This report was immediately denied by military officials both in Saigon and the Pentagon and was subsequently largely discredited. (Orr Kelly, Washington Star, 2 Nov 72; Murray Marder, Washington Post, 7 Nov 72; Rudy Abramson, LA Times, 19 Dec 72; James Reston, NY Times, 27 Dec 72; Christian Science Monitor, 28 Dec 72; NY Times, 6 Jan 73.)

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Hans Morgenthau put it, "we did not want the first Communist soldiers to enter Saigon as the last American ones were on their way out."^{56/} President Nixon was afraid, it was said, that in 5 or 10 years people would be asking: "Who lost South Vietnam?" much as they had asked: "Who lost China?"

The President's Decision to Strengthen the Allied Position

(U) Because his fears and the "hawks" got to him--and also because he now felt confident over the election--the President decided to let the 31 October deadline slip. He decided to try to improve Saigon's chances before signing, by sending yet another massive equipment augmentation and, particularly, by trying for tougher terms in the agreement (see p. 137). This was the move that led, eventually, to the bombing. In the next few weeks several other developments illustrated the President's decision to strengthen Saigon's position before signing the cease-fire agreement. The US stepped up plans to keep its own presence as strong as possible in order to support South Vietnam after a cease-fire. Plans for several thousand civilian contractor personnel to support Enhance Plus maintenance requirements were implemented. The new Defense Attache Office (MACV's successor) contemplated manning levels of either 950 or 1650 civilians (ultimately the number became 1250) and 50 military personnel.^{57/} Four new Consulates General were to take over when the four regional military assistance commands stood down, assuming intelligence and operations responsibilities.^{58/} Successor civilian organizations were to take the place of the Directorate of CORDS (Civil Operations and Rural Development Support) which was to be

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dissolved in late 1972 and early 1973.^{59/} Finally, the United States was trying for a strong international control machinery--a force of at least 5,000--to police possible cease-fire violations. North Vietnam, by contrast, favored a mere 250-man force.

(U) The United States also continued to use its own military power to help influence events. When both North and South Vietnam stepped up their military activity in late October and in November, trying to seize as much territory as possible before a cease-fire, the US stepped up its activity in behalf of the latter. B-52 sorties over the north, which totalled 411 in September, rose to 502 in October and to 848 in November.^{60/} Most importantly, the US continued its plans for retaining in Thailand a capability to resume air combat operations.^{61/} On 24 November, "senior US officials" in Thailand disclosed that there would be a "substantial"* US military presence maintained there for an unspecified period after the cease-fire, permitting the United States to respond "in an armed way" throughout Indochina to any cease-fire violations.^{62/} President Nixon had made this aspect of continuing US support very clear to President Thieu in a letter of 14 November, saying: "You have my absolute assurance that if Hanoi fails to abide by the terms of this agreement it is my intention to take swift and severe retaliatory action."^{63/}

(U) South Vietnam, too, used these weeks to strengthen its own internal security against the expected onslaught of Viet Cong and Communist propaganda and organization. In mid-November, Thieu's

*This included six air bases in Thailand and provision for augmenting US air forces there from 45,000 to approximately 48,000.

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government was reported preparing to place military officers in direct control of hamlet and village affairs^{64/} --just as most of the country's 44 province chiefs were military officers whom he had appointed. Thieu also pushed completion of a new 100,000 man political organization, filing registration papers for it at the beginning of December. Such an organization, according to US analysts in Saigon, would buttress his control of the country after a cease-fire, providing a network of political officers to supplement the army.^{65/}

Hanoi's Reaction

(U) All these developments, plus the very basic substantive changes to the agreement put forward by Kissinger on returning to Paris, gave Hanoi pause. They saw the Enhance Plus program as the first violation of the October agreement, which had stipulated that the flow of US arms would end on 1 November. (The prospect of ending any further reinforcement of South Vietnam's armed forces had been a main inducement for their agreeing to a cease-fire.) They might still have found a way to contend with the new military assistance moves, but also to agree to the new US demands made by Kissinger in November (see p. 137) would nullify all the years of fighting and once more deny--as in 1954--what they had won on the battlefield.

(U) The strategy that the North Vietnamese adopted in response to the US and South Vietnamese countermoves was to stall, i.e., to let the war continue until their terms were met. Kissinger had threatened them often enough with renewed bombing and they knew about the B-52s in Thailand and the 7th Fleet, so they may have reasoned that giving in now would guarantee nothing for the future. Undoubtedly they

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also recognized that, in stalling, time was on their side since President Nixon had to end the war in the very near future or have Congress do it for him.

(U) This stubborn North Vietnamese decision to continue the war rather than agree to the tightened US terms was the immediate reason for the President's decision to resume the bombing of North Vietnam. As Kissinger said when asked the reason for this decision: "We carried out what was considered to be necessary at the time in order to make clear that the United States could not stand for an indefinite delay in the negotiations."^{66/} Hanoi's position left the President with only two choices: continue the war or increase the pressure on Hanoi to negotiate. Actually, he had only one, for his tight time schedule would not allow for continuing a war which Congress would no longer support.

Larger Factors in the President's Bombing Decision

(U) The President's decision to force an agreement from Hanoi on his terms is thus a major part of the "answer" as to why Linebacker II was ordered. But it was not the whole answer. For the sake of the future US position in Southeast Asia, there was also the need to try to guarantee the cease-fire, and to look to the situation beyond it. By ordering the bombing, the President thought--or rather gambled--that he could kill three birds with one stone. First, the bombing might force Hanoi to agree to his harsher demands. Second, in view of South Vietnam's great vulnerability after a cease-fire agreement (with all US forces gone after 60 days), the bombing, having wrecked Hanoi's war-making potential, would have gained a

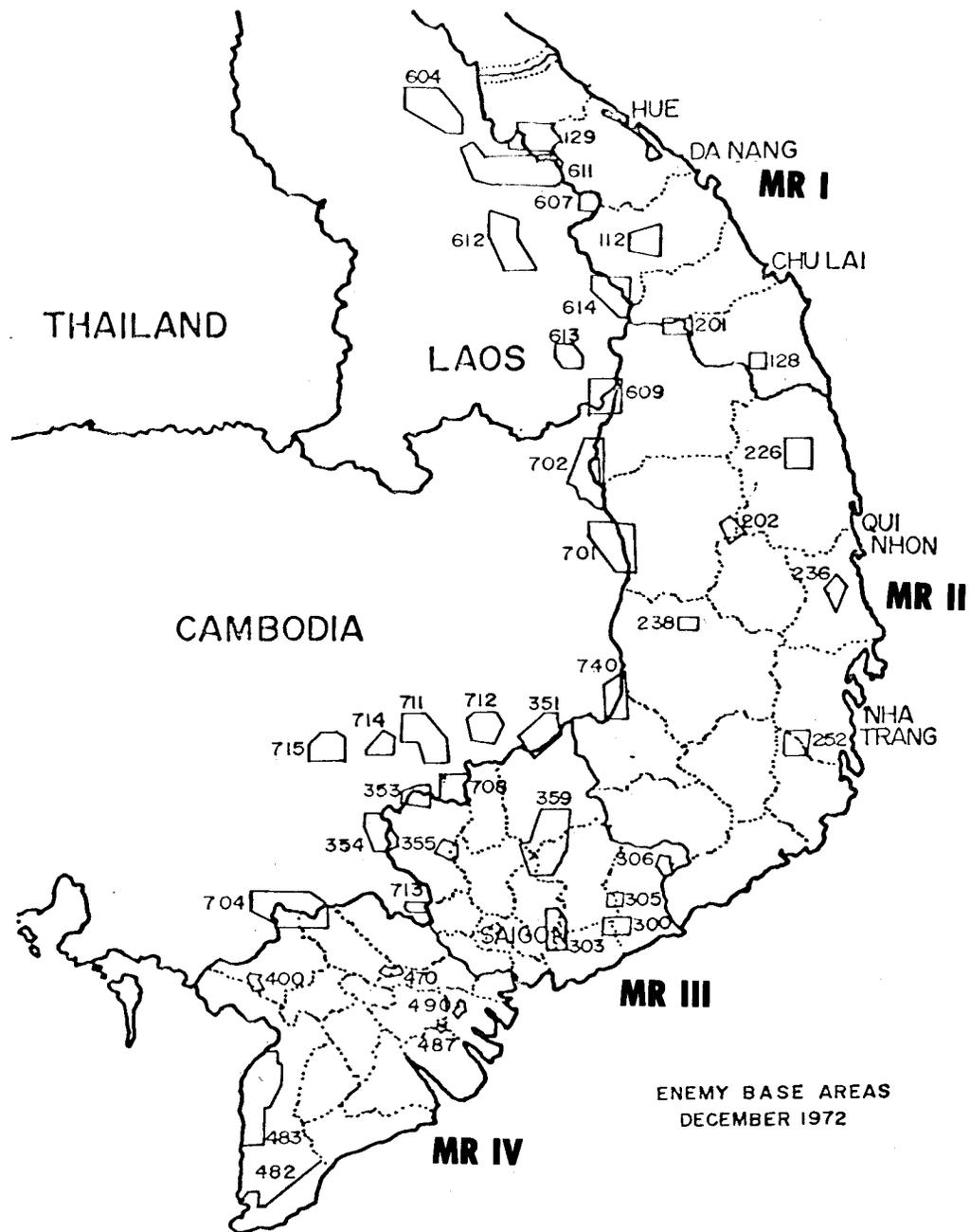
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long breathing space for Saigon before any renewed attack could take place. And finally, the bombing could serve as a foretaste of what would come later (as Nixon had repeatedly promised Thieu) if North Vietnam violated the cease-fire.

(U) This calculated effort to scare Hanoi via air power is reflected in White House comments to the effect that the President had instituted the bombing to impress Hanoi with his will to intensify pressure, and show North Vietnam the extent of his anger.^{67/} It is corroborated by Kissinger's statement at a White House meeting with Harry R. (Bob) Halderman, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, and speech writers just before the President made his cease-fire announcement on TV. Cautioning the group not to claim military victory or say anything that might keep the North Vietnamese from signing the agreement a week hence, Kissinger said: "The only way we can keep North Vietnam under control is not to say that we are out forever. We don't want to dissipate with them the reputation of fierceness that the President has earned."^{68/}

(U) In other words, although it was not something he could discuss publicly, the President used the bombing as a diplomatic weapon, not just to try to get Hanoi's agreement to his new terms, but also for the sake of guaranteeing the cease-fire and other US long-range policy goals. If the bombing made Hanoi give in, the United States could then renegotiate the terms of the agreement from a new "position of strength." But even if Hanoi didn't yield, the bombing would have delayed a renewed enemy offensive, and the fact that the US could still retaliate with bombing from Thailand would make the North Vietnamese think twice about violating the cease-fire. US troops

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Source: MACDI

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would be gone, but the United States would retain influence in South Vietnam and in the rest of Southeast Asia as well. For example, it could still try to salvage the situation in Laos and Cambodia. Such an outcome would be of great importance for the US position in the world, and clearly worth the gamble involved in the bombing. Elliott Richardson, at his Secretary of Defense confirmation hearings on 10-11 January 1973, attested to this larger aim. After characterizing President Nixon's decision to undertake the Linebacker II bombing as a "wise and conscientious" one, he stated:*

We clearly do have other objectives. If we are forced to rely only on a successful Vietnamization program [as Secretary Laird had seemed to suggest], we would just be turning over military responsibility for a continuing war...there would be a continuing threat to Laos and Cambodia...and more fighting. So we also want a cease-fire to extend to Laos and Cambodia and lay the foundation for peace and stability in the entire area."

Later, referring to Linebacker II operations, Richardson said "the bombing was not fundamentally a military matter . . . it was part of the negotiating process."^{69/}

(U) As the agreement signed in January 1973 showed, the President lost part of his gamble, for Hanoi did not yield on the tougher US demands put forward in the November and December talks in Paris. The DMZ did not become an inviolable boundary, there was no mention of North Vietnamese troops in the south, the eventual reunification of North and South into one country was stipulated, and there was no cease-fire throughout Indochina. The main thing the US gained was more detailed provisions, and more men, for enforcing the cease-fire terms.

*At his 8 Jan 73 press conference.

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(U) But the President and Kissinger continued to work towards the larger aim of trying to retain a US voice in Southeast Asia as a whole, and to get desirable agreements on Laos and Cambodia.* The intended means for maintaining US influence was first of all retention of a strong bombing capability in the area to warn off Hanoi. Other means included maintenance of a large international police force to monitor developments, and retention in the South of the fairly strong US civilian force noted earlier. Many analysts believed that for the time being the President's diplomacy, which had Russians and Chinese competing for better relations with the US, would prevent dangerous resupply of the North. Finally, the United States counted on keeping the North Vietnamese in line by promises of economic aid if they kept the peace.^{70/}

(U) All these "larger" aims of course foundered on Congressional opposition to any further bombing and on Watergate's weakening of the President's power to shape events.

Summary

(U) The year 1972 had proved to be a very successful, but also a difficult one, for the Air Force in Southeast Asia. As had happened before, it found itself in the middle, between an Administration pursuing its own plan for winding down the war and a Congress and

*As Kissinger reportedly said in informal discussions with the press at the White House just before President Nixon's announcement (23 January) of the initialling of the cease-fire: "All of this is part of a bigger maneuver which is still going on." (Safire, Before the Fall, p. 673.)

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public, half of which violently opposed any further military action in a war they wanted only to end. As before, the Air Force found itself carrying out orders without always knowing the secret rationale behind the Administration's policies and directives. It was difficult, for example, to understand why the Rules of Engagement would not permit air attacks against the tanks seen massing near the border in North Vietnam for the Easter offensive; to keep on flying the hazardous missions against the North Vietnamese invaders, when at home Congress was trying to cut off all funds for the war; to ignore the widespread castigations in the press during the Christmas bombing.

(U) When the dust had settled, however, the Air Force could more than take satisfaction for the part it played throughout 1972 in a war which from the start had accorded air power only a secondary role. The ground forces had already left South Vietnam and the USAF was well on its way out, when the war literally began all over again in the spring of the year. Without a doubt, the massive resurgence of US air support was the main factor that kept South Vietnam from going under in the bold enemy Easter offensive that followed. Then, together with heroic RVNAF efforts, air action helped turn the whole operation around, shattering the North's ambitious plans of conquest. The severe casualties inflicted by air on Hanoi's six divisions, the successful choking off of their supply lines from home, and then the recapture of Quang Tri, unquestionably played a major role in bringing Hanoi back to the secret talks in July and to the rapidly developing negotiations of August and September which led to the October cease-fire proposal.

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TABLE 8 -- NORTH VIETNAM SORTIE SUMMARY

MONTH	1972						JAN 73
	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	
ATTACK SORTIES.....	61	182	132	1,885	5,862	6,310	
TOTAL SORTIES*.....	973	2,182	2,034	4,722	10,982	12,121	
USN ATTACK SORTIES.....	14	34	68	1,250	3,920	4,151	
USAF ATTACK SORTIES.....	47	148	64	628	1,919	2,125	
USMC ATTACK SORTIES.....	0	0	0	7	23	34	
B-52 SORTIES.....	0	0	0	0	1	271	

MONTH	1972						JAN 73
	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	
ATTACK SORTIES.....	6,493	6,896	6,336	4,999	3,401	3,050	1,629
TOTAL SORTIES*.....	12,879	13,316	13,233	11,368	8,909	7,894	6,731
USN ATTACK SORTIES.....	4,175	4,746	3,937	2,674	1,716	1,383	863
USAF ATTACK SORTIES.....	2,310	2,112	2,297	2,241	1,606	1,548	716
USMC ATTACK SORTIES.....	8	38	102	84	79	119	50
B-52 SORTIES.....	308	572	411	616	846	1,381	535

*Excludes B-52s.

Source: PACAF

TABLE 9 -- LAOS SORTIE SUMMARY

MONTH	1972						JAN 73
	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	
ATTACK SORTIES *.....	13,292	11,448	12,906	5,299	2,486	2,108	
TOTAL SORTIES.....	23,034	20,640	22,814	12,718	9,703	7,493	
USN ATTACK SORTIES.....	2,716	2,563	3,651	716	73	13	
USAF ATTACK SORTIES.....	5,148	4,425	5,644	1,565	740	379	
USA HELO ATTACK SORTIES.....	843	613	264	0	0	0	
VNAF ATTACK SORTIES.....	104	142	111	24	0	0	
RLAF ATTACK SORTIES.....	4,481	3,705	3,236	2,988	2,013	1,714	
B-52 SORTIES.....	671	562	617	68	39	76	
USMC ATTACK SORTIES.....	0	0	0	6	20	2	

MONTH	1972						JAN 73
	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	
ATTACK SORTIES *.....	1,611	1,651	3,256	4,720	5,097	5,366	8,482
TOTAL SORTIES.....	6,923	6,895	8,264	10,625	9,991	10,475	14,916
USN ATTACK SORTIES.....	2	17	12	14	81	114	491
USAF ATTACK SORTIES.....	208	290	486	602	1,338	1,604	2,973
USA HELO ATTACK SORTIES.....	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
VNAF ATTACK SORTIES.....	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
RLAF ATTACK SORTIES.....	1,397	1,651	2,720	3,386	3,327	3,341	4,482
B-52 SORTIES.....	9	20	123	219	150	92	386
USMC ATTACK SORTIES.....	4	6	38	268	449	308	536

*Excludes B-52s.

Source: SEADAB

TABLE 10 -- CAMBODIA SORTIE SUMMARY

MONTH	1972						JAN 73
	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	
TOTAL SORTIES.....	3,591	4,037	3,333	1,711	989	1,880	
ATTACK SORTIES.....	1,460	1,758	1,814	911	417	1,181	
USAF ATTACK SORTIES.....	785	943	871	406	239	445	
USN ATTACK SORTIES.....	6	167	16	83	16	44	
USMC ATTACK SORTIES.....	0	0	0	0	4	106	
VNAF ATTACK SORTIES.....	560	468	671	374	131	390	
B-52 ATTACK SORTIES.....	109	180	256	48	27	196	

MONTH	1972						JAN 73
	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	
TOTAL SORTIES.....	1,399	2,019	1,395	1,204	770	742	1,057
ATTACK SORTIES.....	1,013	1,751	1,158	1,011	533	579	870
USAF ATTACK SORTIES.....	415	888	327	400	381	223	283
USN ATTACK SORTIES.....	2	4	8	6	6	24	89
USMC ATTACK SORTIES.....	85	211	106	224	126	156	342
VNAF ATTACK SORTIES.....	353	1,293	194	381	20	130	156
B-52 ATTACK SORTIES.....	148	190	297	215	163	8	189

Source: SEADAB

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(U) In helping South Vietnam stand off the enemy in the battles that followed the Easter offensive, the Air Force frequently had to improvise and shift missions in order to get the job done. In its support of South Vietnamese ground action for example, gunships normally used for interdiction purposes took on new roles in close air support, reconnaissance, flak suppression and forward air control. Most spectacularly, B-52s were used in the close air support role on an unprecedentedly massive scale. The testimony was unanimous from all fronts as to their effectiveness in repelling the massed enemy assaults that threatened to engulf the South's forces. In the Linebacker I attacks against the North, the Seventh Air Force devised new measures to increase bombing effectiveness, particularly much greater accuracy in delivery of laser guided bombs and improvement in LORAN bombing techniques, to help bring about a massive slowdown in supplies reaching the battle fronts in the South. Throughout the year, in addition to its fighting role, the USAF provided strong logistical support for the Administration's almost frantic efforts to strengthen the South Vietnamese Air Force--including delivery of over 1100 additional aircraft to South Vietnam in the Enhance and Enhance Plus programs.

(U) The final act in the war, the December Linebacker II campaign, controversial as it was, destroyed most of Hanoi's war-making potential, setting back by months any future offensive. It achieved this result moreover, with relatively low loss of life by confining its attacks to military targets and using precision bombing techniques--thereby giving rise to a reassessment of bombing as a cost-effective strategy weapon. Finally, while the Administration had used air

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power as a diplomatic tool numerous times throughout the war, the December bombing furnished a particularly varied demonstration of this role. It showed Hanoi the Administration's willingness to apply US power; it convinced President Thieu the US was determined to end the war; it silenced critics who accused the President of being too lenient with the Communists in his peace terms; and, most importantly, it clearly signaled to Hanoi a planned future "persuasion" role for air in protecting not only the cease-fire agreement but larger US interests in Southeast Asia as well.

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APPENDIX

Transcript of White House News Conference on Bombing Halt
(New York Times 31 Dec 72)

Washington, Dec 30 (AP) Following is text of White House news conference today at which Gerald L. Warren, the deputy Presidential press secretary, announced an end to the bombing of the Hanoi-Haiphong area and a renewal of the private Paris peace talks:

Opening Statement

The President has asked me to announce this morning that negotiations between Presidential adviser Dr. Kissinger, and special advisor Le Duc Tho, and Minister Xuan Thuy, will be resumed in Paris on Jan 8.

Technical talks between the experts of the two sides will be resumed on Jan 2.

That is the extent of the announcement.

Questions and Answers

Q Senator Saxbe has said and been quoted quite widely that the President "appears to have left his senses." And he described the sort of bombing going on in Hanoi as an act of "arrogance and irresponsibility." Gerry, can you reply to that? Is there any reaction from the President?

A No, I wouldn't reply to that.

Q Will there be a halt to the bombing of North Vietnam?

A The President has ordered that all bombing will be discontinued above the 20th Parallel as long as serious negotiations are under way.

Q Effective when?

A I can't discuss the timing of military operations.

Q Are we bombing right now, this minute?

A I really can't discuss military operations from here.

Q Did you say "effective negotiations?"

A No, "serious negotiations."

Q You are implying then that it wouldn't halt until they actually start and we decide they are serious?

A No, as soon as it was clear that serious negotiations could be resumed at both the technical level and between the principals, the President ordered that all bombing be discontinued above the 20th Parallel.

Q Since there will be a bombing halt for New Year's, can we assume it will continue?

A I am not going to discuss future military operations.

Q It appears then that if it is a correct interpretation of what you are saying, that the North Vietnamese have given the President some kind of signal that they are now ready to bargain beyond the point at which the talks were broken off. Is that correct?

A Bob, I can, at this point, only let the announcement speak for itself. I cannot discuss the content of our discussions with the other side.

Q Mechanically, can you tell us at whose initiative these talks are to be resumed, ours or theirs?

A No, I cannot.

Q Can you tell us whether or not they came about through the form of message that Dr. Kissinger and Le Duc Tho forecast when they left Paris?

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A As you know, Dr. Kissinger said on Dec 16, here in this room, and this is a quote, "We will remain in contact through messages." He then said that we can then decide whether or when to meet again--"I expect that we will meet again, but we have to meet in an atmosphere that is worthy of the seriousness of the endeavor."

Q The North Vietnamese have said they will not return to the peace table unless we stop the bombing. Is this also a part of this?

You are leaving it very ambiguous.

A Helen, I can't discuss from here how our contacts proceeded and what form they took.

Q You said here, "As soon as it was made clear that serious negotiations could be resumed at both the technical level and between the principals, a bombing halt would be ordered." Now--that apparently means that a bombing halt has been ordered?

A I said as soon as it was clear that serious negotiations could be resumed at both levels, the President ordered the--

Q So the order has been made. In other words, the bombing halt is in effect?

A The order has been made.

Q When was it clear that these negotiations could proceed in a serious way?

A Don, I can't discuss the contacts between the two sides or the turning (sic) of the contracts between the two sides.

Q Is this a simultaneous announcement?

A No, it is not.

Q Has the order taken effect?

A I cannot discuss that.

Q But it has gone out?

A That is correct, the order has gone out. I cannot, from here, be in a position to discuss the timing of our military operations.

Q As I understand it, the order is to stop the bombing, right?

A Above the 20th Parallel, that is correct.

Q If the technical talks begin on the 2d, what time will it be in Saigon?

A The technical talks will be in Paris on the 2d. I don't know the time.

Q Is Sullivan going back to Paris?

A Yes.

Q Is anyone going out to Saigon?

A I have no travel plans for anybody.

Q Where is General Haig?

A General Haig is on leave.

Q Is Henry coming back this week?

A Yes. Henry has been in daily telephone contact with the President. The President has been talking to him daily on the telephone.

Q When will he be back?

A You can expect Dr. Kissinger will be back and have extensive conversations with the President prior to leaving for Paris.

Q Where has he been?

A On vacation.

Q I know, but where?

A On the West Coast.

Q When does he get back?

A I don't know his precise travel plans.

Q Does that telephone contact include this morning, Gerry?

A I would assume so, although it is rather early in California. I know they talked yesterday and last evening.

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Q It is safe to assume he is coming back some time next week?

A I don't have a travel plan for him, but he will be back prior to leaving for Paris and have extensive conversation with the President before he goes.

Q Is the President at Camp David?

A Yes, the President is at Camp David.

Q Gerry, since you won't discuss the military aspects, is it possible the Pentagon can tell us whether, like, from midnight on there was no bombing?

A It is possible. I just don't know.

UNCLASSIFIED**ABSTRACT**

This study is the sixteenth in a USAF historical series entitled The Air Force in Southeast Asia. It reports on Air Force participation in the last year (1972) of US involvement in the war in Vietnam.

In the first months of 1972 the Administration, accelerating its efforts to get out of Vietnam by the end of the year, relied strongly on the Air Force as its remaining effective weapon against an increasingly aggressive NVN. With US ground forces gone and itself committed to accelerating withdrawal, the Air Force actively supported South Vietnamese forces with close air support, intensified strikes against strong infiltration, and anti-aircraft operations.

The study then describes the disorder and disruptions occasioned by North Vietnam's 30 March "Easter invasion," and the response of the Administration and the Air Force thereto. For the main US answer to the 8-division invasion threatening to overrun South Vietnam was a tremendous augmentation of US air forces. This included sending from the US an entire tactical fighter wing (the 49th) and over 100 additional B-52s, as well as numerous fighter units from PACAF. On the battlefronts of South Vietnam, the USAF provided unprecedented air support to the beleaguered government forces. From being close to defeat with the fall of Quang Tri on 1 May, South Vietnam by July found itself almost free of enemy pressure. Military officials were unanimous in ascribing credit for stopping the invasion to US air support operations in ARVN's crucial battles. This included an unprecedented, widespread use of B-52s in a close air support role.

Concurrent with its air support in the South, the Air Force conducted an intensive air interdiction campaign against railroads and other military targets in North Vietnam. This effectively cut off the North's supplies from China as well as the crucial resupply operations to its forces fighting in South Vietnam. These air operations in the North, along with the US Navy's mining of North Vietnam's harbors, were in accordance with President Nixon's 8 May decision to isolate the North by interdicting all its supply routes.

The study correlates the defeat of North Vietnam's invasion of the South with the overtures Hanoi subsequently made for renewal of peace negotiations. The latter culminated in the draft peace proposal North Vietnam submitted in October. The final part of the study discusses the obstacles to signing the October proposal, President Nixon's efforts to get better terms after the November elections, the final breakdown in negotiations, and the resumption of US bombing of North Vietnam in Linebacker II in December. Throughout this final phase, the political as well as military aspects of the bombing are discussed.

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GLOSSARY

AA	Antiaircraft
AAA	Antiaircraft artillery
ACMS	Comptroller's Office, SAC
ADVON	Advanced Echelon
AFAG	Air Force Advisory Group
AFB	Air Force Base
AFSSO	Air Force Security Service Officer
AGM	Air-to-Ground Missile
ALO	Air Liaison Officer
ANG	Air National Guard
ANGLICO	Air and Naval Gunfire Liaison Company
Arc Light	B-52 operations in Southeast Asia
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
B-3 FRONT	Enemy command organization responsible for the western II Corps area and subordinate to NVA Headquarters
BARREL ROLL	Interdiction and close air support operations in eastern Laos, and strikes in northern Laos against personnel and equipment from North Vietnam
BOBS	Beacon Only Bombing System
CAP	Combat Air Patrol
CAS	Close air support
CBU	Cluster bomb unit
CDR	Commander
CHECO	Contemporary Historical Examination of Current Operations (Hq PACAF)
CINC	Commander-in-Chief
CINCPAC	Commander in Chief, Pacific Command
CINCPACAF	Commander in Chief, Pacific Air Forces
CINCPACFLT	Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet
CINCSAC	Commander in Chief, Strategic Air Command
CJCS	Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
CM	Chief's Memo (JCS)
Combat Skyspot	(S) MSQ-77 and SST-181 controlled bombing missions in Steel Tiger, Route Package 1, and South Vietnam
Commando Flash	PACAF plan (1971) to augment tactical air forces
Commando Fly	Second tactical air augmentation plan (Feb 1972)
Commando Hunt	Seventh Air Force interdiction campaign in the Steel Tiger area
COMUSMACV	Commander, US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
Constant Guard	Nickname for TAC OPLAN 100 for deploying augmentation forces from CONUS
CONUS	Continental United States
CORDS	Civil Operations and Revolutionary (Rural) Development Support, a joint US civil and military staff that directed US assistance to the GVN in support of its revolutionary (rural) development program.

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CRIMP	Consolidated Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces Improvement and Modernization Program
CSAF	Chief of Staff, Air Force
CSAFM	Chief of Staff Air Force Memo
Daisy Cutters	(S) Bombs with fuze extenders, to explode at surface to kill personnel and defoliate
DASC	Direct Air Support Center
DIB	Daily Intelligence Briefing
Disco	USAF radar aircraft
DMZ	Demilitarized Zone
DO	Director of Operations
ECM	Electronic Countermeasures
Enhance Plus	Nickname for program of increased equipment shipments to SVN, Oct-Nov 1972
EOGB	Electro-optically guided bomb
EW	Electronic Warfare; Early Warning
FAC	Forward Air Controller
FOL	Forward Operating Location
Freedom Porch Bravo	Nickname for intensive one-day air strike against Haiphong (including B-52s) 15 April 72
Freedom Train	Nickname for program of intensified air operations against North Vietnam developed in April 1972
FSB	Fire Support Base
GCI	Ground-controlled Intercept
GRADS	Ground-Radar Aerial Delivery System
GTC	Ground Target Charge
GVN	Government of South Vietnam
Iron Hand	(S) SAM and radar-controlled AAA suppression flown by specially equipped F-105s
Island Tree	Late 1971 program for dropping sensors to monitor bombing effectiveness along Ho Chi Minh Trail
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
LGB	Laser-Guided Bombs
Linebacker II	Bombing campaign, primarily by B-52, against NVN, 18-29 Dec 72
LOC	Line(s) of Communication
LOH	Light Observation Helicopter
LORAN	Long-range Airborne Navigation
LZ	Landing Zone
MACDO	Director of Operations, MACV
MACOI	Military Assistance Command, Office of Information
MACV	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
MAG	Marine Air Group
MAP/FMS	Military Assistance Program/Foreign Military Sales
Market Time	(S) Coastal Surveillance of RVN by Cmdr, 7th Fleet, USN
MEDT-C	Military Equipment Delivery Team-Cambodia

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MIG	Series of Soviet jet fighter aircraft, named for designers Mikoyan and Guevich
MJCS	Internal Implementing Paper, JCS
MK	Mark (ordnance designation)
MR	Military Region
MSQ	Mobile special-purpose ground-based radar guidance bombing system
NGFS	Naval Gunfire Support
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
NVN	North Vietnam
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense
PACAF	Pacific Air Force
PACOM	Pacific Command
Pave Aegis	105 mm howitzer-equipped gunship
PD	Probability of Destruction
Plain of Jars	Militarily strategic area north-northeast of Vientiane in Laos
POL	Petroleum, Oil & Lubricants
POW	Prisoner of War
PRC	People's Republic of China
PRG	Provisional Revolutionary Government (VC)
Project Enhance	Program for supplying SVN with additional equipment, summer 1972
QL	Quoc Lo (National Highway). Designations of major highways in RVN, e.g. QL-1, QL-14.
Red Baron	Code name for study of air-to-air encounters in Southeast Asia
Red Crown	A radar-equipped US Navy destroyer on station in northern part of Gulf of Tonkin
ROE	Rules of Engagement
RP	Route Package
RTAFB	Royal Thai Air Force Base
RTU	Replacement Training Unit
RVN	Republic of Vietnam
RVNAF	Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces
SAC	Strategic Air Command
SACADVON	Strategic Air Command Advanced Echelon
SAF	Secretary of the Air Force
SALT	Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty
SAM	Surface-to-Air Missile
SAR	Search and Rescue
SEA	Southeast Asia
SIOP	Single Integrated Operations Plan
SPECAT	Special Category
SPECTRE	Call sign for the AC-130 gunships at Ubon RTAFB, Thailand
SRAG	Second Regional Assistance Group
Steel Tiger	Seventh Air Force operating area in southern Laos
STOL	Short Take-Off and Landing
Strela	SA-7
SVN	South Vietnam

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Tac	Tactical
TAC	Tactical Air Command
TACAIR	Tactical Air
TACC	Tactical Air Control Center
TACS	Tactical Air Control System
TDY	Temporary Duty
Teaball	Weapons control facility at Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Base
TEWS	Tactical Electronic Warfare Squadron
TFS	Tactical Fighter Squadron
TFW	Tactical Fighter Wing
TOC	Tactical Operations Center
TOT	Time Over Target
TOW	Tube-launched, Optically-tracked, Wire- guided missile
TRAC	Third Regional Assistance Command
UE	Unit Equipment
USAF	US Air Force
USMC	US Marine Corps
USN	US Navy
VC	Viet Cong
VNAF	Vietnamese Air Force
VNMC	Vietnamese Marine Corps
Wild Weasel	(S) Designation for specially configured fighter aircraft to hunt and kill enemy radar-controlled surface-to-air weapons
WSAG	Washington Special Action Group
XOOG	Deputy Chief of Staff, Plans & Operations

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FOOTNOTES

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CHAPTER II

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